

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, March 24th, 1878.—Manasseh brought to Repentance.—2 Chronicles xxxiii. 9-16.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 12, 13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“As many as I love I rebuke and chasten; be zealous, therefore, and repent.”—Revelation iii. 18.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 2 Chron. xxxiii. Tuesday, 2 Kings xxi. Wednesday, vs. 10; Proverbs i. Thursday, vs. 12; John xxi. Friday, vs. 12; Genesis iv. 1-15. Saturday, Proverbs iii. Sunday, Matthew iii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Manasseh making Judah to err. Vs. 9. II. Deaf to God's Word. Vs. 10. III. Carried into captivity. Vs. 11. IV. Penitent and forgiven. Vs. 12, 13. V. Fruits meet for repentance. Vss. 14-16.

QUESTIONS.—What was the character of Hezekiah's father? Of Hezekiah? Of Hezekiah's son? How do you account for these differing characters? What makes men and nations differ? Eph. ii. 8.

Vs. 9. How did Manasseh make his people to err? To what excesses of idolatry did he go? To what excess of murder? 2 Kings xxi. 16. What was Moloch?

Vs. 10. How did God speak to Manasseh? 2 Kings xxi. 10-15.

Vs. 11. How was Manasseh punished? How was he fettered? How long was he in exile?

Vss. 12, 13. Does affliction always soften men's hearts? Why not? What great mercy did God now show?

Vss. 14-16. What proof did Manasseh give of genuine repentance?

Notice the difference between a worldly and godly sorrow for sin; between the penitence of Cain and that of David; between that of Saul (1 Sam. xv. 34-30), and that of Manasseh; between that of Judas and that of Peter.

We have seen that the excellent Hezekiah was the son of a very wicked father. We are now to see that Hezekiah was himself the father of a more wicked son, who, as if in contempt of his father's memory, rebuilt the high places, which had been destroyed (2 Kings xviii. 4, 22), offered insult to the God of Israel by building altars to the host of heaven—the sun, moon, and stars (Deut. iv. 19), and dedicated some of his children to the fires of Moloch.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 9.—Manasseh.—Born after Hezekiah's sickness (vs. 1, compare 2 Kings xx. 6), and probably an only son. 2 Kings xxi. 1; Isa. lxii. 4, 5. The name is that of one of the ten tribes, and seems to have been chosen from the father's desire and policy to reunite all Israel into one nation. xxx. 6. Made Judah. This statement sums up the account of vss. 3-8, which is identical with that given in 2 Kings xxi. 3-9. There is here, doubtless, attributed to the king that which belonged to the party in power, which the king represented. The leaders in that party, during the king's minority, were doubtless chiefly responsible, both for the course of events and for the corruption of the boy-king. The alliance, or, at least, the friendly connection with the Babylonian king, in Hezekiah's time (2 Kings xx. 12-19), indicates the existence of corrupt and corrupting influences in the government before the father's death. Worse than the heathen. Between the party that were for Jehovah and the dominant heathenizing party there was intense antagonism. 2 Kings xxi. 10-16. At this time there was such a general destruction of the sacred books, that the discovery of a single copy in the next reign created the profoundest impression. 2 Kings xxii. 8.

Verses 10, 11.—The Lord [Jehovah] spake, etc.—By his prophets. The aged Isaiah, according to tradition, was the first victim of the persecution. Habakkuk is thought to have been slain, and enough “innocent blood” was shed to “fill Jerusalem from one end to another.” See Jer. ii. 30. Wherefore the Lord [Jehovah] brought. 2 Kings xix. 37, as the Babylonian king with whom Judah allied herself, and thus developed this abominable corruption, was a rebel prince risen against Esarhaddon, the retribution came naturally, though not less from God. Among the thorns. The word translated “thorns” means also hooks or rings, to put through the nose in order to lead or hold a wild beast. Carried him to Babylon. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, and Babylon was subject to Assyria; but, previously,

with a viceroy at Babylon. But, as the latter revolted, Esarhaddon put down the revolt, abolished the vice royalty, and “fixed his own residence at Babylon for about thirteen years (B. C. 680-667). He was the only Assyrian king known to have lived there; but bricks from his palace, bearing his name, have been recently discovered. Jewish tradition makes the date of this activity the 22nd year of Manasseh's reign, or B. C. 667; at which time colonists were sent from Babylon into Samaria by this same king. 2 Kings xvii. 24; Ezra iv. 2, 10.” Thus is the accuracy of the account witnessed both from other Scripture, and from ancient profane history, and the ruins. Verses 12, 13.—When he was in affliction, etc.—Whether Manasseh became a truly good man, we are not told; but he was at least thoroughly convinced that the safety of his nation depended on the (at least) external worship of Jehovah, and that, by the rejection of that worship, the nation's ruin had been well nigh compassed. Brought him again to Jerusalem. Jehovah, by his providential control of nations and events, caused him to be thus returned and restored.

Verses 14-16.—Built a wall etc. Evidently for the better defence of Jerusalem against attack, especially from Assyria. Hence probably he had cast off all allegiance to that government before this work. Compassed about Ophel. Enclosed it, or, rather, completed the wall begun by Jotham. xxvii. 3. Ophel was “the swelling declivity by which the mount of the Temple slopes off on its southern side into the Valley of Hinnom. Took away the strange gods, etc. But did not utterly destroy them. xxxiv. 7.

The subject of our lesson is “Manasseh Brought to Repentance”; and the Scripture of our lesson presents to us (1), Manasseh's sin; (2), Jehovah's consequent treatment of him; (3), his conversion to Jehovah; and, (4), his subsequent course.

I. The Sin. Verse 9.—(1.) It was committed by Manasseh; hence by the son of a praying, godly father; by the king of a nation; by a king who had succeeded to a government previously administered in God's fear. (2.) The sin was peculiarly a fountain sin. It was incorporated in the government; and not confined to the personal, private conduct of the king and his associates. (3.) The people corrupted were peculiarly God's people. They of Judah, and especially of Jerusalem—the Holy City, capital of the chosen nation, and seat of the one only sanctuary of Jehovah. They who were to have been God's witnesses to the whole earth. (4.) The corruption was extremely and terribly aggravated. “Worse than the heathen”—so that the greatness of the degradation was to be measured, first, by the altitude from which the fall was, and second, by the depth of infernal infamy to which it carried the fallen.

II. Jehovah's Treatment of the Sin.—Verses 10, 11.—(1.) He sought by his word to correct the evil. “He spake” to king and to people. There were evidently the clearest and most powerful instructions and admonitions, warnings and forewarnings, rebukes and appeals, arguments and persuasions. (2.) He visited the sin with swift and awful retribution, after his word was rejected. The nation was conquered; the Holy City, now all unholy, captured, and the nation insulted in the insults heaped upon the king. The time for repentance came; the call was spurned. Then, but not before, judgment, retribution. God did not smite till it ceased to be mercy not to smite. Our call to repentance will not be prolonged for ever.

III. The Conversion.—Verses 12, 13.—(1.) The affliction was a new call to conversion. The judgment, though retributive, was also gracious. It was temporary and temporal, not final and eternal. (2.) The king humbled himself before God greatly. The affliction did not thus humble him. It humbles no man thus. He humbled himself; and only thus is there true and acceptable humiliation. (3.) He prayed to Jehovah for pardon and help. There is no prayer without true humility. Wonderful, how God will let a miserable sinner come to him, after a life of awful and flagrant wickedness? Yet this is his grace, and our hope in Jesus Christ, who for us was made sin, that we in him might become righteousness.

IV. The Subsequent Course.—Verses 14-16.—(1.) It was prosperous. He was

sent home to be king; and that over an independent people. He strengthened the national defences, and secured the national dignity. This was of God. So in fact, but not in a temporal way, does repentance always secure favor. (2.) It was reformatory. “Fruits meet for repentance.”—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, March 31st, 1878.—Review.—Idolatry.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”—Exodus xx. 3.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

Manasseh not only did wickedly himself, but he made the people of Judah even worse than the heathen for they did not know about the true God. For a long time the Lord often spoke to Manasseh and his people, through Isaiah and other prophets; but they would not listen. He was made to mind at last, as children are often shut up to make them think over their bad deeds. The great Assyrian army came back, Manasseh was frightened, and the enemy's captain found him hiding away among thorn bushes. They put chains on his limbs, and carried him off to Babylon. Now in his trouble he thought about his sins; he felt how great they were; he was sorry because he had offended God. He repented and prayed to God to forgive him; and the Lord not only forgave him, but brought him back to his kingdom, even all the way to Jerusalem. Manasseh showed that he had truly repented; for he tried to undo the wrong he had done. He took away the idol out of the house of the Lord, and tore out the altars he had built, and repaired the Temple altars that he had broken down, and offered sacrifices on them to the Lord. But he could not undo all that he had done; for the people still sacrificed on high places, though their offerings were to the Lord God, and not to idols.

Boys' Department.

Dark Days.

London, on the very hottest of July days, is not, perhaps, the place of all others where one would choose to live, always supposing that the power of choice were left us. We should find the glare on the pavements and on the white houses, the close, oppressive atmosphere, the brown and withered grass in the squares, perfectly insupportable after a very few days, and we should fly to Cowes or Ryde, to Norway or New York, for change and refreshment.

But if, like Polly Marker and “the boys,” we were moneyless, homeless, friendless, outside the great Babylon, we should probably spend the July days as she did, and revel, as the boys used to do, in the “jolly heat.”

Polly was the eldest of the family by four years, and, if you care to look at her, as she stands clinging to the railings of the Square gardens, I think you will agree with me that there is something in her face that makes you wish to look again. Straight soft hair laid smoothly on each side of a narrow head, surmounted by a sun-bonnet; a wide, sad mouth and humorous eyes that belie, by their sudden twinkling glances, the story of the face. The eyes are a family feature, moreover, only Dick's are larger, and the lashes that shade them are more indisputably Irish, and are Polly's pride. Dick is standing, with his hands in his pockets, leaning against a lamp-post whistling, while the baby lies lazily at his feet, sucking the branches out of his shoe black box—for the whole family are waiting for a job.

Suddenly Polly, who has been gazing intently and wistfully at the geraniums in the Square, and making believe she is a lady and this is her own garden, drops her hands hastily from the railings and retreats backward toward the boys as the Square gardener shakes his fist at her from the inside. “And if you could give me a few flowers for the evening, Stanley,” she says, in a loud, clear voice—for she is still “making believe” that this is her own garden—“I shall be much obliged.”

“Oh, I say, Polly,” says Dick, remonstratingly, as the baby sets up a howl of anguish, you're just treading

on him, you know, and you should just look where you're going, you know.”

Polly's dream thus rudely disturbed, she becomes prosaic instantly; picks up the box she has upset, gives the baby an admonitory slap, and thumps him down on the pavement some two yards further off, where he cries privately, in a silly, whimpering way, for some minutes, and then begins a laborious progress toward the blacking-box again.

Suddenly out of Green Street, over which the afternoon shadows were folding down, a horse came picking its way daintily into quiet, sunny Grosvenor Square. The horse was a wicked-looking chestnut, and it came up the centre of the road, tossing its pretty head, and stepping high with its four white-stockinged feet. The whole family rose with one accord, and Polly pointed out the beautiful creature for baby's admiration, but Dick had caught sight of the rider, and was standing motionless. The rider was a lady—young enough in reality, but old to Dick, to whom twenty-one lay in such a very dim future. She sat her horse well and lightly, looking straight between the delicate, sensitive ears. She had golden brown hair that the sun caught and gilded into a glory, and she had brown eyes that lighted upon the children presently, as they stood watching her. Her groom had just turned the corner as she beckoned to Dick and handed him a letter.

“Will you drop that into the letter-box for me?” she said, “and here is sixpence.”

Dick took the letter, touching his ragged curls to the sweet eyes and shining face; then he closed his hand on the money, and darted across the road to drop the letter into the box.

The lady turned and called out, “Thank you,” as she passed him, cantering out of the Square, and smiled again, leaving Dick gazing after her entranced.

“What a beautiful lady!” he said, going back to Polly's side, with a sigh. “Yes, very pretty,” said Polly; “and, my! what a horse!”

“She had such a low voice!” said Dick.

“Yes, precious low,” said Polly; “I couldn't hear a word she said. My! how could she come a-walking into the Square like that?—wouldn't I have been a-cantering, just!”

“Haden't we better go home?” ventured Dick, presently; “there's no use standing here all day.”

“How much did she give you?” said practical Polly, stretching out her hand to touch the one that covered the sixpence.

“Sixpence,” said Dick, opening his fingers; but there was a mistake somewhere, for in the middle of his hot little palm lay a shining sovereign, and all the glory of the sinking sun seemed to flicker in little shafts of light on the piece of gold.

“Shut your hand, tight,” said Polly, in a breathless whisper—“the gardener, you know—and we'll go home.”

“But mayn't we spend the sixpence?” said Dick, aggrieved, while his lips quivered—“just for dinner, Polly?”

“Of course,” said Polly, sharply; “we'll change it and have dinner, and keep the change; only don't cry, Dickie, and if you'll take baby, I'll carry the box.”

They sauntered along in a little procession of three, all down Green Street and into a dirtier, drearier part of the town—dived down side streets and alleys to a little dinner shop that Polly knew, where the procession stopped.

“Two slices of bread and two bacons,” said Polly, to whom the possession of the sovereign imparted a novel dignity, “and a ha'porth of milk, and—this to change, Mrs. Nixon.”

Mrs. Nixon rung the coin down on the counter in a business like way, and then looked sharply at Polly for a minute, and said,

“You're rich, aren't you, my dear?—and where did it come from?”

“Oh, we've got it to change,” said Polly, “and we're to keep the sixpence.”

“Well! you're honest children,” said Mrs. Nixon, kindly, “and takes after your mother; so there's your dinners, and there's the change—nineteen blessed shillings and a sixpence.”

They took the slices of bread and bacon out into the shine, and ate it sitting on the pavement; and they fed baby by turns, while Polly kept the

money tight in her hand: then, when the feast was over, they rose slowly up, and went away down the dark alley, where men and women stood about in discontented groups, up a creaking wooden stair, to a door, of which Polly had the key, and the other side of which they called “home.”

It was a room that, to unaccustomed eyes, would have looked very blank and and bare and desolate, for the bed was only a long low wooden frame with a couple of blankets and a checked quilt upon it. The table was a box, and other furniture there was none, save a couple of rough stools and a cupboard; but over the mantel-shelf there was nailed up a little gallery of portraits, with a setting of peacock's feathers and a background of china ornaments—a faded daguerreotype of a pretty woman with a baby in her arms, a common photograph of a lad in hussar uniform, with “For Dear Mother,” scrawled beneath, and an alarming black head that bore the name of “Father”—though the eyes must have been clever and loving indeed that could have traced any resemblance between that startling outline and the tall, quiet, consumptive man, who had lived out his weary life among the uncongenial souls in Crowe's Alley.

Well, it had not affected him so very much, after all, and they were kindly people in their way. They used to step on tiptoe, when they remembered, past the door of the room in which he lay propped up by pillows, gazing patiently out at the sunrises and sunsets that just glimmered in over the roofs of the other house. When he died, and the “missus” fretted for him, and money was slow to come in, they cheered her up, and helped her, these rough folks, and forgot that they used to consider her “fine” when they brought her “just a drop of gruel, dearie,” or “a slice of bread for the childer,” and sat up for an hour or two when the fever came upon her, and saw that she was decently buried when she died.

After that, time was a miserable blank to Polly for some weeks. The baby was fretful, and Polly's arms were unaccustomed, for mother used to nurse him always; and Dickie used to cry at nights a good deal, until the folks in the alley clubbed together and bought him a blacking-box, and he began to earn pennies. By that time Polly had learned her way to the pawn shop, and the room was beginning to look empty, and the children were not so neat as they had been; but, through all the misery and loneliness and want, there was something beautiful growing into the little home—a kind of glory springing up in Polly's life that made it grander and nobler than it used to be, when she was little and selfish, and mother cared for her.

Tired and worried, she sat down this evening on one of the broken stools, and hushed the fractious baby to sleep, softening her voice to a kind of mournful hum, while Dickie leaned against her knee listening. Then she laid him softly in the bed, and tucked him in, and she and Dickie took down the ragged Bible and read a verse, and then sat on for a long time in the darkening room, looking out of the narrow window, and thinking. Well, Dickie was thinking of the lady's face he had seen in Grosvenor Square, and of the nineteen shillings and sixpence; and Polly, with her tangled head laid down upon the sill, and her tired hands crossed on her lap, was wondering where the pennies were to come from to-morrow, and if—She raised herself suddenly, and went over to the fire-place to lean her head upon the wall under mother's picture, as she had a way of doing when she was very tired. But if it must go too?—if she must come in tired some evening, and have no mother to go to, even a picture—if she must wake up in the night, and creep over the sleeping boys, and have no spot on the wall to which to turn and be comforted? “Why, then, I must bear that too,” thought Polly, “and I shall grow used to it.”

“Polly,” said Dick, suddenly, “where's the money?”

“Oh, I've put it in the box,” said Polly—“down at the very bottom; and we must take it out with us very day, Dick, until we see her again, you know, to give her the change.”

“I shall go to bed,” said Dick, yawning; “help me, Polly, I'm so tired.”

So Polly forgot herself and her own