

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, June 22nd, 1879.—Consecration to God.—Malachi iii. 8-18.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 16-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."—Malachi iii. 17.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Malachi i. Tuesday, Malachi ii. Wednesday, Mal. iii. iv. Thursday, Nehemiah x. 28-39. Friday, Acts v. 1-11. Saturday, Matt. iii. Sunday, Hebrews viii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Record of sin. Vss. 8, 9. II. Pledge of mercy. Vss. 10-12. III. Words of the ungodly. Vss. 13-15. IV. Blessings of the ungodly. Vss. 16-18.

QUESTIONS.—Historical.—What was the date of the last lesson? Who were prophets then? What is the probable date of the history?

I. Vss. 8, 9.—For what does Malachi blame his people? Who confirms him in New Testament times? Acts vii. 51. Of what special robbery does Malachi speak?

II. Vss. 10-12.—What duty does God lay on his people? What reward does he promise? Are liberal souls to God and to his service ever famished? Prov. xi. 24, 25.

III. Vss. 13-15.—What self-justifying words do the ungodly often use? How is the world's judgment of God's people often unjust?

IV. Vss. 16-18.—Why do God's true people seek each other's society? Comp. Matt. xviii. 19, 20; Heb. x. 25.

Of Malachi's parentage, birth-place, and date of birth, absolutely nothing is known; but he evidently lived long after the times of Zechariah, for the temple was not only rebuilt, but its service had become fearfully insincere and mercenary. It is probable that he was a contemporary of Nehemiah, as Zechariah and Haggai had been of Zerubbabel, for his censures are for similar offences which excited Nehemiah's indignation. The language of Zechariah to his times had been encouraging and hopeful. That of Malachi was denunciatory and admonitive, for his times were apathetic, self-justifying, and full of formalism and self-righteousness. The voice of Malachi, therefore, was appropriately stern. The book concludes with solemn words, closing the records of the Old Testament, yet laying hold of the New by a promise of the forerunner of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

EXPOSITION.—I. Record of Sin. Verses 8, 9.

Verse 8.—Will a man rob God? The question marks the sin as incredible. The word translated "rob," means "to cover," then to take covertly; that is, on the sly, in way of deception, as though God could not see. It is not open robbery, but covert cheating, a baser, meaner sin. Wherein have we robbed him? Often in trying to deceive God we succeed in deceiving ourselves. In trying to palm off upon him a half service for a whole service we may come to believe the half to be whole. Sin blinds the sinner to itself, and to himself. In tithes and offerings. That is, in respect to these, in failing to render to God what his law required. See Num. xviii. 21-28; Deut. xii. 5-8; xiv. 22-29; xxv. 12-14, etc. The tithes and offerings represent all service due to God.

Verse 9.—Cursed with a curse. The curse is first God's holy displeasure; then its expression in penalty, vs. 11 suggests a failure of crops. The "whole nation" seems to have fallen away in the time described in Nehemiah xiii. 10-31.

II. Pledge of Mercy. Verses 10-12. Verse 10.—A full service from us brings a full blessing to us. All the tithes—entire surrender, whole heartedness, "eye single." Meat in mine house. Food for God's ministers, the priests and Levites, and so a support of Divine service, representing all provision demanded of us for the extension of Christ's kingdom. Prove me, etc. Put me to the trial, test me, take me at my word. If I will not open the windows of heaven. Shutters or gates were to be drawn aside to let down the rain, this is figurative, and was understood by the writer. The language may well remind us of the gift of the Spirit. Acts ii. 1-4. That there shall not be room, etc.

Verse 11.—Rebuke the devourer.—The devourer is, probably, the locust, certainly some animal destructive of vegetation, and to rebuke it is to prevent it from destroying. The principle applies in spiritual things. Neither shall your vine, etc. Grapes were extensively cultivated.

Verse 12.—All nations, etc.—The envied should become the enviers. This prosperity was to be a divine gift, and not a mere "natural result."

III. Words of the Ungodly. Verses 13-15. Verse 13.—Your words have been stout against me.—They charge upon God the just fruits of their own defrauding of him. He here sets this before them as a further sin. What have we spoken, etc. They could not see the wrong of their complaints. Men first deceive themselves as to their own deserts, then make false charges against God, and are then greatly astonished and indignant when rebuked for those charges.

Verse 14.—It is vain to serve, etc.—A specimen of the "stout" words. The spirit of them is that we are to serve God in order to get a reward, not from love, righteousness, duty. This is a selfish spirit, in which no true service can be given. See Christ's words in Matt. vi. 1-6.

Verse 15.—And now we call the proud, etc.—The prophet is a Jew, and as the "whole nation"; that is, the nation as a whole had committed the sin, he as a Jew, joins in the confession, which is also a charge, and says "we call the proud happy. The language seems, also, to imply that leaders in sin among the Jews had grown rich and powerful, not in spite of their transgressions, but by means of the same.

IV. Blessings of the Godly. Verses 16-18. Verse 16.—Then they that feared the Lord [Jehovah].—"Then" even, some were true (vs. 9). The fear which characterizes God's servants is reverence, not terror; its principle, love, not hate. Spake often one to another. Unfortunately for a good many sermons and addresses there is nothing in the Hebrew to which this word "often" answers. There is only the idea of conversation, speaking with one another, mutual conference. The Lord [Jehovah] hearkened and heard.—"Hearkened," or listened, expressing his interest and desire to hear: "heard," expressing the gratification of his desire. A book of remembrance, etc. A strong way of asserting that no holy act, and no holy person, fails to get place, and forever to keep place in God's mind and heart. Esther vi. 1, 2. But the fact is even stronger than the figure, for a book may be lost or destroyed, but no name is lost to him.

Verse 17.—They shall be mine, etc.—God will own them, claim them, and treat them with such care and honor as one gives to his choice treasure.

Verse 18.—Then shall ye return, etc.—The judgment of the last day, like many a preceding judgment, makes clear and broad the distinction between God's sons and Satan's.

THE TOPICS ARE.—(1.) The Indictment.—The first point in it is, "Ye have robbed God." The people had withheld the tithes God required; and for sacrifice, instead of bringing the first and best, they had brought the lame, the sick, the torn—the very refuse of their stock.

The second count in the indictment is: "Your words have been stout against me." Or, more specifically, "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God"—than which there could scarcely be a more atrocious offence. And yet, it is an offence, than which there is scarcely one more common. They are actually saying of God's service, "We have tried it, and it doesn't pay."

(2.) The Challenge.—"Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, and prove me." There is a way of serving God—or pretending to serve him—that doesn't pay. Hence the Lord's gracious expostulation: "Give me a chance to bless you. Deal fairly with me. Bring ye all the tithes into the store-house, . . . and prove me now, . . . if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing."

(3.) The Vindication.—In marked contrast with half-hearted religionists, the close of the lesson introduces us to a company of sincerely godly people, who fear God with a holy love, who de-

light in him, and who prove it by their constant speech. The Lord points to them, as it were, with a sort of fatherly pride; calls them his jewels. —Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 29th, 1879.—Second Quarter Review.

DIAMOND TEXT.—"To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.—Acts x. 43.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

What had God done by his power for the Jews? Yet, in this lesson, we find them Robbing God! How can a man rob God?

You wonder how the Jews could have acted so. Are you sure you have never robbed God?

These Jews not only robbed God; they talked against him! Read and explain vs. 13-15. Did you ever say, "It is of no use to be good? I am not going to try any more; the bad people are better off than the good ones?"

Jesus has the name of every child here, who loves him, written in his own book.

When that book is opened, it won't make any difference whether you have been rich here or not; all will see the difference then between the righteous and the wicked, for this is what God says will happen to those who serve God here. (Repeat Golden Text.)

Answer to Scripture Enigma

- No. 24. TYRE. 1. Lo Gen. 19. 2. Bethan y John 11. 3. Pharpa r 2 Kings v. 12. 4. Ev Gen. 4.

Scripture Enigma

No. 25.

- 1. A woman who slew a mighty captain. 2. The field of blood. 3. One of the twelve spies. 4. Joshua's former name. 5. A fertile country conquered by Israel, renowned for its oxen.

The initials and finals read downwards name a patriarch and his father-in-law.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER XIX.—Light for Marion at Last.

The last work allotted to John Saybrook ere quitting his native land was the tender and holy one of filling in and rounding out the pauses in Fleda's earthly mission so far as Marion was concerned. Very precious work he regarded it too, a rich harvest to reap, since the great Husbandman had laid bare the field and mellowed the soil with his subduing grace. Yet it was evident that Marion was best left much to herself, or rather to the pilotship of that infinite Hand which would make no mistakes. Very tender were the eyes that watched her, the hands that ministered to her, and above all, the hearts that prayed for her.

"As for talking and preaching, we may do too much of that," said Mrs. Hammond. "Marion sits apart in a desert place now, children, but the dear Lord has been there before her. Leave her with him."

Marion's physical and mental nature has undergone a tremendous change, certainly, which had struck deep at the vital forces of her life. But as yet she was in that transition state which betrayed some lack, some want, some unexplained trouble. They who loved and pitied her knew not how to touch it, and therefore watched and waited. Although there was no clear shining of the day about her, she was emitting beams from the hidden sun in new dispositions and habits. There was no more crying out against God, no more complaints, only submissive tears; and she was endeavoring herself to all about her by rare thoughtfulness of others and forgetfulness of self.

The old family physician had put her into the hands of a celebrated oculist, who while enforcing complete darkness about her, was so attracted toward the blind girl as to give her many hours of his companionship, helping to while

away the days of probation. As he had strong confidence that she would yet receive her sight, these were days of great suspense and anxiety to herself and friends, and all clung to the true-hearted surgeon with eager hope. Wise, tender, hopeful, and full of electric force, it was not strange, though inexpressibly touching, to see how this poor blind child held on to him. This troubled John sorely:

"The old way of clinging to earthly props! What shall we do, mother, to unloose her hands?"

"God will take care of that too, my son," answered Mrs. Hammond. And John believed it when, an hour after, in passing the door of her room, he heard his sister's voice softly chanting these lines with pathetic earnestness:

"Gently unclose these childish hands that cling To such inadequate supports as these."

One evening the surgeon came down stairs with a troubled face, and, in reply to John's inquiries, answered:

"Mr. Saybrook, I regret exceedingly having encouraged your sister so much. I had great hope for her, and thought she could best aid my remedies by hopefulness herself; but my endeavors and her enforced sufferings are all in vain."

"Do you think, indeed, that she will never see again?" asked Mrs. Hammond, while tears of which he was not ashamed suffused John's eyes.

"I fear it," answered the physician. "Of one thing we may be very glad, friends," he continued, with a grave smile: "her eyes are very beautiful, and blindness has not marred their expression, as in most cases."

"I fear the most for its effect upon her mind, doctor," replied Mr. Saybrook—"that she will sink into a state of hopeless despondency. She has always been so active, bright, and gay, and is peculiarly sensitive in her organism."

"Mr. Saybrook, the Lord is leading that dear child, and will help her to adjust herself to the new life before her. It is a terrible affliction, but our God has infinite resources, and will prove their richness in her case. Do not fear for her. Marion will come out of this fiery ordeal a beautiful, useful, and happy woman. Break this to her gently," continued the doctor. "although I think she partly understood it from my conversation;" and he passed out of the house with a something warmer than pity aglow on his fine face.

John slowly and sadly ascended to the Marion's room, and taking her in his arms, mingled his tears with hers. He had thought in vain of the easiest way to break the sad truth to her. But those tears told all for him, and were enough to verify Marion's suspicions.

"Don't grieve, dear John," said she; "I know all about it. Dr. Storrs thinks I shall never see again, I'm sure. Poor doctor! and he has tried so hard. You should have stayed down stairs longer in the light, John. My only pleasure is thinking of you all happy in the light. It is so very dark here," she continued, mournfully. "Dear John, I thought I had given it all up once; I promised Fleda, you know, that I would give up my will, my way, and I do wish to. Help me, John. It makes me weep to think that I am done with light and beauty—that I am as far away from you all in one sense as if already in eternity."

"My poor little sister," cried John, "we have prayed so that you might see, but perhaps the answer to our prayer was more than we could bear. God has a blessing in reversion. Oh, believe it, and accept it, darling."

"I do, I will, John, but there is something more; I want a more visible Christ, something to lean on and walk with and comfort me, a living, breathing presence. Oh, I do need it so, but all is dark, dark, so dark! If Fleda were only here to make it tangible! How can I find such a Saviour?"

"Marion," asked Hattie, who had entered and thrown herself down at John's knee, "don't you remember that quaint Arabic translation that Fleda was so fond of quoting?"

"Speak to him, the sorely tempted, lift him from his gulf of woe; Tell him that his very longing is itself an answering cry; That his prayer, 'Come, gracious Allah!' is my answer, 'Here am I.' Every inmost aspiration is God's angel undefiled; And in every 'O my Father!' slumbers deep a 'Here, my child.'"

"Is that all John?" asked Marion, joyfully; "and will he be my Saviour,

my very own, to light my darkness, to comfort my loneliness, and subdue my sin—no longer an illusion, a dream, a sweet holy vision, as it has seemed in weeks past? I see it all now John."

"Yes, my sister, he will be all this and more if you will take him."

"Then I can be happy even if I am blind, dear John."

"And remember, Marion, that Christ will be to us just what we will have him. His adaptation to the needs of every human life with all its exigencies is wonderful. It is surprising how much good we put away from ourselves by not understanding that Heart. To you he says:

'Child of my love, "lean hard," And let me feel the pressure of thy care. I know thy burden, dear blind child; I shaped it, Poised it in mine own hand, made no proportion In its weight to thine unaided strength; For even as I laid it on I said, 'I shall be near, and while she leans on me This burden shall be mine, not hers; So shall I keep my child within the circling arms

Of mine own love. Here lay it down, nor fear To impose it on a shoulder which upholds The government of worlds. Yet closer come! Thou art not near enough; I would embrace thy care, So I might feel my child reposing on my breast.

"Thou lovest me? I know it. Doubt not, then; But loving me, lean hard.'"

A few days after this the household on the avenue were startled by an acknowledgment from Dr. Storrs of his desire to make Marion his wife.

"Impossible!" cried John and Hattie in a breath; "you cannot wish to take her, hopelessly blind as she is. She can only fetter you, and will be unequal to all of a wife's duties. Surely you have not thought of all."

"You must let me be the judge in this matter, friends. I know what would constitute my happiness, and think I can help her bear this blindness with joy to herself and her friends. Will you not trust her to me?"

John looked puzzled, but wise, far-seeing Mother Hammond answered: "The doctor is worthy of her, John. Let Marion speak for herself."

So when after an hour they found Marion with a radiant face, and more like herself than for a year before, they knew she had met her destiny, and felt with a strange mixture of gladness and regret that Dr. Storrs possessed a mystic charm to light her darkness that they could not evoke.

John kissed and blessed her with a look on his face that even Hattie wondered at, for his thoughts went backward all along the path since their sainted mother left to him this charge. How wayward she had been, this dear blind sister, and how deeply tried his faith and trust! How bitter the scourge before she had been brought to yield her will to God! But at last her storm-tossed bark had found sure anchorage, and her heavenly Friend, her heart's best Lover, would see to it that she missed not the joys of life and love. How tenderly had he provided for her! How safe and blest she was! and how strange that he could not more readily have left all to "God to manage," as Fleda had advised! That the mother long since gone looked down from heaven with songs of exultant joy, blessing the Heart that planned the darkness that light might dawn, John had no doubt, and with an overflowing soul said to the little circle gathered round the prayer-altar at night: "Let us never distrust God's providences again, however dark and mysterious the cloud that envelops them. Let us do all our part, and he will see to the rest. 'The end shall tell that the dear Lord ordereth all things well.'"

A little girl, when her father's table was honored with an esteemed guest, began talking very earnestly at the first pause of the conversation. Her father checked her very sharply, saying, "Why is it that you talk so much?" "Tause I've dot somesin to say," was the innocent reply.

Sarah had pasted all the beautiful pictures on the black chair, and asked grandpa's opinion of it. "Well, I don't see," said the old man, "but that it's about as useful as it was before it had the pictures on it."

More miles can be made in a day by going steady than by stopping.