

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1881.

SECOND QUARTER.

Lesson VI.—MAY 8.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke xv. 11-24.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 21-24.

This lesson is connected immediately with the last, both in the occasion of its presentation by the Lord and in its subject-matter.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee."—Luke xv. 18.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Prodigal Son, Luke xv. 11-24.
T. God our Father, Isa. lxiii. 7-16.
W. The Father's Bounty, Deut. xxxii. 1-14.
T. The Father Forsaken, Jer. ii. 1-13.
F. The Wanderer's Prayer, Psa. li. 1-19.
S. The Joy of Restoration, Jer. xxxi. 1-21.
S. Grace Welcoming the Lost, Luke xv. 11-24.

PARALLEL TEXTS.

- With vs. 12: Mark xii. 44.
With vs. 13: Psa. lxxxi. 12; Jer. ii. 5; Rom. i. 21; Titus iii. 3.
With vs. 18: 2 Chron. xxxiii. 12, 13; Jer. i. 4, 6; Lam. iii. 40; Lev. xxvi. 40; Psa. xxv. 11; xxxii. 5; 1 John i. 9.
With vs. 20: Isa. xlix. 15; Acts ii. 39; Eph. ii. 13, 17.
With vs. 21: Psa. li. 4; 1 Cor. viii. 12.
With vs. 22: Isa. lxi. 10; Psa. xlv. 13, 14; Matt. xxii. 11; Gal. iii. 27; Phil. iii. 8, 9; Rev. xix. 8; xxi. 2.
With vs. 24: Rom. vi. 13; Eph. ii. 1; v. 14; Col. i. 13; Isa. xxxv. 10.

GRACE WELCOMING THE LOST.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Wandering, Vss. 11-13. II. Want, Vss. 14-19. III. Welcome, Vss. 20-24.

QUESTIONS.—What was the title of the last lesson? What of this? To whom did Jesus speak the parables of these two lessons? To meet what complaint of theirs? What was represented as lost in the first parable? What in the second? What in the one now before us? What special difference is there in these three ideas?

I. Vss. 11-13.—Whose wandering is here described? Give each particular of it from vs. 12, 13. What do you suppose to have been the young man's motive? What does this wanderer represent? Who is the father? What are the goods which the father gives him? What is the far country to which he goes? Read the description of wandering in Isa. liii. 6. Of whom was this spoken?

II. Vss. 14-19.—How did want come to this young man? What did he do in his distress? What effect upon his want had this? What want comes to every sinner? What vow did the wanderer make? What should all who are in want decide to do? What invitation does Jesus issue in Luke xiv. 17?

III. Vss. 20-24.—Repeat the Golden Text. Who said this? What had he to encourage him in this resolution? How did the father meet the wanderer? How did he further prove the son's welcome? What vow should every wanderer from God make? Give some account of his welcome.

TOPICS.—Jewish law of inheritance; famines in Palestine; the Jewish hatred of swine; hawks; "came to himself," what? significance of robes, rings, shoes, feastings, and merriment; dead, but alive again; to what other than wandering sinners has this parable been applied?

NOTES.—Verse 11.—The two sons undoubtedly represent the two classes whose presence led to the discourse; the scribes and Pharisees (the elder son), and the publicans and sinners (the younger son). All men are represented by these two classes. The two sons are types of two characters.

Verse 12.—The younger. Naturally, more thoughtless and reckless. The portion. That of the younger son would be one-third, that of the elder two-thirds (Deut. xxi. 17). He thought he could be happier if he had his father's property without his father's presence, love, and care. He divided. The self-righteous are nominally with the father, under his direction, but not yielding a hearty obedience. The young man is allowed to make the trial.

Verse 13.—Not many days after. The apostasy of the heart, as St. Bernard here well observes, often running before

the apostasy of the life. Gathered all together. The open preference of the creature to the Creator. A far country. Represents the breaking loose from restraint, the outward separation from religion and morality. The heavenly Father never loses sight of or ceases to care for, watch over, and protect, his prodigal son. Even the famine and the hunger are gospel messengers sent from him.

Wasted his substance. His faculties, and his opportunities of doing and being good. Riotous living. The natural result of selfish separation from God is sensuality, seeking gratification in earthly objects.

Verse 15.—When he had spent all. The employment of sin is brief. A mighty famine. The liberty of self-enjoyment is not unlimited, as the sinner would fain think.

Verse 15.—Joined himself. He was in a state of absolute dependence upon this person, being, in effect, a slave. A citizen. He with all his misery was not a "citizen," but a stranger, in that far land. The sinner sells himself to the world. The world uses him as its drudge, and sin as its slave. He becomes cheap in its sight of that very world for the sake of which he has forfeited all. To feed swine. An office the most degrading to a Jew, involving ceremonial uncleanness and separation from other Jews.

Verse 16.—The "husks," the pods. The kharûb tree is an evergreen. Its pods usually hang curved,—whence the Greek name meaning little horns,—and are much like those of the honey-locust of the North-eastern United States, though firmer and thicker. In Cyprus they are literally the food that the swine eat. At the present day they are employed in Spain and other countries as food for horses, asses, and mules. No man gave unto him. The friends he had made by sin deserted him in his need. The citizens had nothing to give him.

Verse 17.—Every element in the experience of a true repentance is clearly traced. The sinner is like one out of his reason. Repenting is coming to himself—to the realities of life, to reasonable living, to his right mind. He who finds God finds himself. Hired servants, those who serve God, not in the spirit of filial love, but from the hope of a reward. I perish. Am destroying myself. The very lowest possible motive suffices for a starting-point in Christian experience. The prodigal is moved by hunger in the first instance.

Verse 18.—I will arise. He remembers that he has a father, and trusts in his love. Go to my father. Who was his father still. There is none else to whom the sinner can go. I have sinned, &c. We may injure ourselves, we may wrong our neighbor, but, strictly speaking, we can sin only against God.

Verse 19.—I am no more worthy, &c. Genuine penitence always feels its unworthiness.

Verse 20.—Toward his father. Toward, not to. He did not come to his father, his father came out to him. This actual setting-out on the homeward journey is the turning-point in the prodigal's life. We must think of the wanderer as coming back weary, foot-sore, hungry, and in rags. He is yet "a great way off,"—not as yet near the home of peace. His father saw him. There is a delicate and beautiful implication of the father's unsleeping tenderness. His heart yearned over his prodigal, and his waiting eye caught the most distant possible glimpse of him. And ran. The return of the sinner is expressed by the word going, but God's coming to the sinner by running. Kissing, in the East, is the pledge of reconciliation and peace.

Verse 21.—No more worthy. The father's love prevented the request for a servant's place.

Verse 22.—Bring forth the best robe. Or, a robe, the best one; not mere clothing, but a long and richly embroidered vestment, such as are kept in store in the East, and are presented to honored guests. A ring on his hand. Doubtless the father's signet-ring which invested him with equality for the time being. To bestow a ring was accounted, in Oriental lands, one of the highest marks of favor; it is the seal of the Holy Spirit's regenerating work. A seal is used to mark any thing as genuine. Shoes on his feet. In these

days servants and slaves wore no shoes, and were thus distinguished from the members of the family. This was therefore tantamount to a declaration that he was not to be regarded as a servant, but as a son.

Verse 23.—The fattened calf. The well-known fattened calf, that stood in the stall, ready for the appropriate festal occasion. Merry. The feast indicates the joy of a forgiving God over a forgiven man, and the joy of a forgiven man is a forgiving God.

Verse 24.—Was dead. . . lost. The former state of the sinner. He was worse than dead; he was utterly lost in sin. No wonder they rejoiced at such a restoration to life and home.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

After Jesus had told the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Silver, he went on to tell this of the Lost Son.

A man once had two sons; the younger said to him, "Give me the share of the property which will finally belong to me." The father then divided all he had, and gave the younger son his share. Before long the young man set off for a distant country, and wasted all his money in wild and foolish living. When it was all gone, there came a great famine, and he began to be in great need.

He was glad to find a place, where he was sent to feed the swine, a shameful task for a Jew. He was so hungry that he would have been glad to eat the husks that the swine had for food. Then he began to think that his father's servants had plenty to eat, while he, the son, was starving. He said, "I will go back to my father and tell him that I have sinned against heaven and done wrong to him. I do not feel worthy to be called his son, and will ask him to treat me like one of his hired servants."

So he went homeward, but when he was a great way off his father saw him, and ran out to meet him, and fell on his neck and kissed him. Then the son said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But his father called: "Bring the best clothes for him to wear; put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and kill the fattened calf: we shall have a feast to day. My son, who was dead, is alive again; he was lost in a strange land, and now he is home." And they were merry.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

Booths' Department.

Scripture Enigmas.

No. 125. Of all th' examples in the Word made plain, From these sad warnings may we wisdom gain, That we may not receive God's grace in vain!

- 1. Sad case! Good conscience first away he cast, Then wrecked his faith, and erred from truth at last, And taught the resurrection to be past.
2. He once saw God upon the mountain-side; Then offered incense with strange fire, and died, And none durst mourn, for God was glorified.
3. Unhappy king! He scorned the words of truth— The Elders' counsel, and conferred with youth, And lost, at Shechem, Israel's crown in sooth.
4. "Behold!" sang Moses, "grapes of Sodom!"! Such Their bitter fruit and poisonous wine—so much Like this of asps—so deadly to the touch!
5. Unhappy woman! Foremost of her race, And greatly favoured: yet she fell from grace, Seduced and banished from her native place.
6. There was one lip, one language, and one name; A lovely land of unity and fame! Ah, no! the land of babbling and of shame.
7. The merchant city, mistress of the world, On every shore her banners were unfurled. Now from her proud seat to destruction hurled.

- 8. Death and destruction! 'Tis their woeful doom; Who on God's patience wilfully presume— A dread hereafter, wrath beyond the tomb!
9. Here at his threshing-floor their tears they shed, When Jacob's sons bewailed their father dead, Ere yet the mourners to the grave were led.

10. O son of Joash! By thy zeal betrayed, What will the ephod be which thou hast made, When Israel's vows are at thy altar paid?

11. This scarlet token, by a woman shown, Secured deliverance for her house alone While the whole town besides was overthrown.

The first and final, faithfully expressed, Lost time and opportunity attest, "And we not saved" will then supply the rest.

CURIOS QUESTIONS.

Transpositions.

196. Make five words, each one of which has the same five letters: 1. Where we live and die. 2. The centre of life. 3. A modern poet's name. 4. Isaac's grandfather. 5. A city of Afghanistan.

197. Form three precious stones. 1. To wipe quickly affix a quarter of a yard. 2. To a delicious fruit affix a third of an ell. 3. To a wide door prefix one-fourth of the same.

198. A valuable kind of wood spelt with eight letters. 1 and 2 are a mother's name, 3, 4, 5 are a common animal, 6, 7, 8 are one.

Answer to Scripture Enigmas.

No. 123. R abb i, A mo s, C aea r, H ose a, E pist l, L emue l. ISRAEL, RACHEL. 124. G ehazi, O rphai, D orcas, I shboaheth, S heba, L uke, O g, V aahiti, E unice.

ANSWERS TO CURIOS QUESTIONS.

193. HALF SQUARE OF WORDS: P A C I F I C, A B A T I S, C A R E T, I T E M, F I T, I S, C.

194. DIAMOND OF WORDS: G, F E D, F L O R A, G E O D E S Y, D R E S S, A S S, Y.

195. WORD BUILDING. P, Pa, Par, Part, Party.

HOW TO MAKE YOURSELF UNHAPPY.—In the first place, if you want to make yourself miserable, be selfish. Don't care about anything else. Have no feelings for any but yourself. Never think of enjoying the satisfaction of seeing others happy; but rather, if you see a smiling face, be jealous lest another should enjoy what you have not. Envy every one who is better off in any respect than yourself; think unkindly towards them, and speak lightly of them. Be constantly afraid lest some one should encroach upon your rights; be watchful against it, and if any one comes near your things snap at them like a mad dog. Contend earnestly for everything that is your own, though it may not be worth a pin. Never yield a point. Be very sensitive, and take everything that is said to you in playfulness in the most serious manner. Be jealous of your friends lest they should not think enough of you; and if at any time they should seem to neglect you, put the worst construction upon their conduct.—Living Church.

ALL DEAD.—Have you ever read "The Ancient Mariner"? I dare say you thought it one of the strangest imaginations ever put together. . . dead men pulling the ropes, dead men steering. But do you know I have lived to see that time, have seen it done? I have gone in churches, and have seen a dead man in the pulpit, a dead man as deacon, a dead man handing the plate, and dead men sitting to hear.

Select Serial. A Thorny Path.

BY HESBA STRETTON.

CHAPTER XVII. HOMEWARDS.

Don stood speechless before Mrs. Clack, while his large, glistening eyes were fastened on her face, and his lips moved without uttering a word, as if she had been indeed one risen from the dead. He could hardly believe that he saw right, and he dared not stretch out his hand, even if he had possessed the strength, to touch her and make sure she was no vision.

Mrs. Clack's first feeling was one of great gladness, for she had mourned over Don as one who had strayed away for a little while, possibly into bad ways, but who would come home at last, like the prodigal son driven by famine to his father's house. Here was Don back again, and she was full of joy, until, looking more closely into his pinched and shrunken face, with the temples fallen into hollows, and the glassy eyes shining hungrily, as if he was starved to the very point of dying, a sudden shock of distress and terror ran through her.

"Why, Don!" she cried, catching both of his wasted hands in her own, "Don, my boy, where have you been so long?" "They told me as you were dead, dead of the fever and buried," he gasped, his breath almost failing him as he spoke. "Who said I was dead?" she asked, in mingled grief and anger. "It was Cripple Jack," he answered, leaning against the door-post and bursting into tears, "here in this very place; and I've been mourning after you, and we've been wandering up and down anywhere, without a place to shelter us, when you were here all the while!"

"Come in, Don," she said urgently, "come in at once. I'm not dead, and there's a home for you, and you shall tell me all about it when you've had something to eat." "But there's little Dot," he replied, raising himself up, and turning away feebly to fetch her. "Oh, she's lost," said Mrs. Clack in a mournful voice; "Peggy lost her the very day before I came home from my holiday in the country, and she's never been heard of since."

"It was me as took her away," whispered Don; "she's been with me all along, and she's close by now. I'll go and fetch her." But Dot had grown tired of being hid, and already she was running out to find Don, calling him loudly in her clear, childish voice. He was trembling too greatly to go to meet her, but Mrs. Clack ran to bring her in, trembling almost as much as Don for very joy. What would Hagar feel when she found the child? But Mrs. Clack's joy faded away as she watched how slowly and painfully, and with what difficult steps Don climbed the steep staircase to the room above.

He sank down breathless and exhausted on his old seat by the fireside. Still it was with a happy smile that he looked round the room. It was exactly the same as in the old times; not a thing was altered. Mrs. Clack herself looked no older. Was it ten months since he had last seen them, or years instead of months? The tears dimmed his eyes a little as she gazed about him, and felt the comfort of the fire stealing through his numbed and weary frame. He could not speak, for his happiness was beyond words.

Mrs. Clack was too happy, though there was so terrible a change in Don. He was at home once more, and she could take care of him and nurse him well. Then there was Hagar's happiness to think of, ay, and Abbot's. Little Dot was standing close by Don, leaning half shily against him, as she scrutinized Mrs. Clack's strange face, and though she was not so rosy as she had been in the summer yet she was healthy-looking, and her little hands and arms were plump and firm. She made Don's face look still more pinched and hunger-bitten. His eyes met Mrs. Clack's as she looked fixedly upon them both. "Cripple Jack told me as little Dot was to be taken to the workhouse," he said, with a faint light breaking in his dim eyes, and with a smile playing on