

Teachers' Department.

Sabbath School Scripture Lessons.

JANUARY 3rd, 1858.

Subject.—RANK AND DIGNITY OF THE AUTHORS OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION.

For Repeating.

Heb. i. 1-4.

For Reading.

Heb. i. 1-14.

JANUARY 10th, 1858.

Subject.—REASONS WHY WE SHOULD ATTEND TO THE THINGS WHICH WE HAVE HEARD.

For Repeating.

Heb. ii. 5-9.

For Reading.

Heb. ii. 1-2.

THE QUESTIONER.

Mental Pictures from the Bible.

Reader, you need but "search the scriptures," To comprehend our Mental Pictures.

[No. 45.]

A MIDNIGHT PRAYER-MEETING.

A number of men and women are gathered together in an inner room. Whilst engaged in earnest conference and prayer, they are startled by the sound of some one seeking admittance. Trembling as if detected in some unlawful proceeding, one goes to ascertain by whom they have been disturbed. At the sound of his voice, she hastens back and makes a statement, which causes the rest to look upon her as a maniac. They all rush to the door, and upon its being opened, one enters who makes a communication to them, which fills them with wonder and gladness.

SOLUTION to Picture No. 44.

Balaam attempting to curse the hosts of Israel.—Numbers xxiii. 4-13.

Effect of a wrong Word.

A whisper awoke the air,
A soft, light tone, and low,
Yet barbed with shame and woe:
Ah! might it only perish there,
No further go.

But no a quick and eager ear
Caught up the little meaning sound;
Another voice has breathed it clear.
And so it wandered round

From ear to lip, from lip to ear,
Until it reached a gentle heart,
That throbb'd from all the world apart—
And that it broke.

It was the only heart it found,
The only heart 'twas meant to find,
When first its accents woke;
It reached that gentle heart at last,
And that it broke.

Low as it seemed to others' ears,
It came a thunder-crash to hers—
That fragile girl, so fair and gay.
'Tis said a lovely humming-bird,
That dreaming in a lily lay,
Was killed by but the gun's report
Some idle boy had fired in sport;
So exquisitely frail its frame,
The very sound a death-blow came.
And thus her heart, unused to shame,
Shined in its lily too;
Her light and happy heart, that beat
With love and hope, so fast and sweet,
When first that cruel word it heard,
It flutter'd like a frightened bird;
Then shut its wings and sigh'd,
And with a silent shudder died.

Kate Allison's Christmas.

Somewhere about seven o'clock on the evening of the 24th December, 185—, you might have seen a woman with a basket on her arm enter a grocer's shop in High-street, and wait there patiently until her "turn" came. She was not beautiful, but there was good-humour in her bright blue eye that was even fascinating; while the quiet dignity of her manner, added to the correctness of her diction, led even strangers to remark that she had known "better days."

Kate Allison was a dress-maker. Her father once a tradesman of no little repute in the very town where she now toiled for bread, had died insolvent, at a period when the affairs of wiser men than he were embarrassed; leaving his sons and daughter to the benevolence of his creditors, and a numerous circle of so-called friends. From the first the orphans received their father's wardrobe and their own, a portion of the household furniture around which so many memories fondly clung, and a gratifying expression of respect for him over whose grave they wept. From the last they were indulged with more advice than they could well remember—even had they desired it; and, in some few instances with tangible, but still insignificant, expressions of regard. Forth, then, into the world they went, to carve their own fortunes; or rather, at least as far as Kate was concerned, to seek the guidance of that ever-living Father, without whom they must wander in a double orphanhood across the stage of time.

The "boys," as Kate still called them—though Howard had almost reached his nineteenth year, while James was one year younger—soon resolved to sail for Australia, and invited their sister to join them. But Kate's affections

clung to the dear Isle where the beloved remains of father and of mother seemed to await the hour when she should rest beside them; and she was firm in her resolve to let no billows roll between those graves and her still loving heart. The boys went forth, and she was left alone. There was no time to hesitate; a favorable opportunity occurred for learning still more of an occupation for which she had from childhood exhibited a remarkable aptitude, and she resolved, at once—not happily, without prayer—to enter upon the course marked out before her, and became, as we have said—a dressmaker.

True, Kate had talents which might have won her a position of at least moderate eminence, as a governess. In fact, the only reason she ever gave for not directing her attention to the training of the young was one which proved that she was conscious of her own abilities.

"I might have been a governess," she would remark, "could I have afforded to wait three or four years before attaining complete independence. As it was I knew, that at twenty-one, and with but few accomplishments, I could not command a salary large enough to enable me to assist my brothers, should it be necessary to do so. As a dressmaker, I may be clothed as humbly as I will, may live in one room, and narrow my expenses when and how I please—as a governess I must consult the wishes of my employers. You will see at once that there is more comfort in the less intellectual sphere."

And Kate was right. The acquaintances who would have patronised her as a governess, forgot her now; while in the circle where her daily toil was appreciated, and which she resolutely narrowed to the strangers of the neighbourhood, she became an object of increasing interest, and even of warmest admiration.

Six years had passed since the two brothers left their native land. Christmas, with all its old-time memories, had come; and Kate thought much about the absent ones, and sighed for one fond look, one loving kiss, one visit hand in hand to unforgotten graves. Pity her, ye who gather joyously round the well-spread board, and feel that no dark heaving ocean rolls between your heart and the true hearts ye love! Pity her more, ye who have known, who still know, the sorrow of the gathering where ever and anon the soul yearns over some long vacant chair, or misses the sweet voices of the loved ones who are gone!

Yet Kate looked forward to a happy Christmas. Was not her work all finished, so that she might have time to enjoy; had she not invited little Hetta, the sick child round the corner, to dine with her that day; would it not be pleasant to have more time for books, and quiet peaceful rest? Oh, it was to be happy, no question about that; for cheerful, loving, patient, was the heart of Katherine Allison, and "the peace that passeth all understanding" was hers, to strengthen and elevate. Doubtless the secret lay in this—that the joys of the hereafter were, to her, realities; and that her childlike faith in Him who bought those joys by the outpouring of his priceless blood, was deepening, widening every hour, under the teaching of the Spirit of all truth. Happy, indeed, are they who find their joy in the unchangeable and everlasting God!

Thus, then, the little dressmaker went forth with lightsome heart; and, passing by the homes of wealth and ease, whence sounds of laughter or of song came forth upon the air; and through the busy market-place, where thrifty but still smiling housewives bargained for the wherewithal to feast the hungry boys and girls who would come "home" to-morrow; ran on, as we have said, to the great ten-mart there to wait the leisure of the active shopman, whose acquaintance she had made in her previous visits to that well-laden counter.

"Merry Christmas!" said the kind-hearted grocer, when at length Kate stood before him, and gave her meek order. "Let it be a good pudding, Miss Allison, and a large one, too."

Kate smiled, and her eyes grew even brighter yet. "No, no," she said; "I shall have but one guest, Mr. Marshall, and that a little one."

"Never mind," said he, as he hurried her purchases into the basket, and added a little parcel of figs for "Christmas." "You will be as happy, I dare say, as many who invite a score."

"Oh quite," said Kate, with a pleasant little laugh. "We mean to enjoy ourselves, I can assure you!"

The grocer followed her with his eyes, to the great disgust of his next customer, till the crowd shut out basket and basket-bearer alike, and then turning again to business, said,

"A pound of Kate, did you say, ma'am?"

"No!" thundered the impatient fair one;

"Coffee."

Poor Marshall, he was dreaming!

Meanwhile, the unconscious cause of his mistake wended her way from shop to shop till all her little marketings were ended; and then, with a light purse and lighter heart, regained her quiet rooms in a narrow and gloomy street, not far from the rich grocer's private residence. Here she threw off her bonnet and sat down on a low stool before the fire, which, by the way, had burst into a blaze just as she opened the door and was now lighting up the cold face of the lonely one with kindly glow.

"Yes, yes," said Kate, as she smiled upon the reddening coals, "a happy Christmas; none the less because I have only one heart to elger, only one appetite to please. And yet if only Howard or James—but no, I will not think of it. Shall I, who have so many reasons for abundant thankfulness, repine, because my loved ones are not here with me?"

She rose, and lowering the blind, put by her shawl and bonnet carefully. Coming back to her old seat, she bowed her head and prayed. It was a prayer for James and Howard first;

then for herself, that she might have a heart to feel the love of God in Christ, and to rejoice in His rich mercies every day and hour. She numbered, with a simplicity as beautiful as it was childlike, the most apparent blessings of her lot,—amongst them that of opportunity for witnessing the happiness of those around her, and of sympathising with the joy the season seemed to spread on every hand. It had been no ill-adapted lesson to the rich and thoughtless, could they have heard those simple words of thankfulness and joy.

When Kate arose, her eyes were wet with tears, but on her lip there was the smile of tranquil happiness. And as she moved about the little room, seeming to tread on air, none could have failed to know that her heart was at rest.

That evening many a wanderer paused before the little window in that dismal street, and marked a graceful shadow on the blind. Kate was preparing for the morrow. How many thousands in bright England were doing just the same! And yet there was a charm in her exertions which perhaps hovered over but few of the busy confectioners beside. She had so little thought of self amidst it all!—her dinner was to gladden the sick child, or it would have remained unpurchased yet.

"Dear little Hetta!" cried the bustling, smiling little dressmaker, as she paused with aching arms in the midst of "stirring the pudding," "she shall have a merry time, dear child! Oh, what a good thing it is to have a reason for all this work! If only somebody was here, I declare I should laugh for joy!"

And she lay down that night with wearied frame, but with a heart full of deep gratitude to God, and self-denying love for little Hetta! What marvel then that she slept peacefully?

Day dawned; and a child's feeble knocking roused Kate from the unaccustomed reverie in which, on this special morning, she indulged before she rose.

"I knew that I might come to breakfast if I liked," said Hetta, ten minutes later. "Mother said that I must tell you that it was my own fault."

"I must scold you then," said her friend, archly. "You shall wait half-an-hour for your breakfast by way of punishment."

Hetta laughed, and presently made herself useful by blowing up the fire which Kate had kindled in the outer room. Then, at the end of the half-hour, they sat down by a little round table, and partook of the breakfast they had themselves prepared.

Little Hetta was so lame as to be able to walk but a short distance without extreme fatigue; but this did not affect Kate, whose observance of Christmas-day—pardon her, ye who conscientiously act otherwise!—was far more social than religious; and who thought as much of the advent of the Babe of Bethlehem at Midsummer as at Christmas. So when they had read together from the Bible which had belonged to Katherine's mother in her girlish days, and knelt in prayer beside the cheerful hearth, they had a pleasant chat about the village home where the lame child had spent her earliest years, and where there were "such flowers!" as Hetta said, "more beautiful than any one who had not seen them could possibly imagine!"

Kate soon grew busy over her dinner, and over the arrangement of her rooms. They had a good laugh over the Christmas decorations—consisting of three holly branches and a bunch of laurestines—for little Hetta had a decided impression that "if she only could stand upon a chair," her aid would be most valuable; and Kate gave a playful lecture on vanity that ended in the downfall of all the decorations on her devoted head. Everybody who has ever been in a good temper will know that this was a joke rich enough to last the day, and accordingly it was referred to, on the average, once in every hour while the child's visit lasted.

You despise that, Mr. Cynic? Very good. The happiness of holy lives—a happiness as far above you as the stars above our sod—is made up of the things which you and such as you reject with proud disdain.

Dinner-time. Not the hour when rich men sit at their luxurious boards, and daintily seek after some choice morsel that shall still further tempt their appetite. No, it was the less fashionable, but certainly more reasonable, hour which follows close upon the noontide.

Happy little Hetta; and still happier Kate! Never did friends more joyous sit down face to face to eat a Christmas dinner. Presently a bright thought occurred to Kate.

"Hetta," she said, "shall we go out this afternoon, and take a slice of pudding to little Johnnie?"

"Yes, and to Bob," said Hetta—"may we?"

Bob and Johnnie were the lame child's noisy little brothers, from whose loud, boisterous mirth it was a deed of charity to take her, even for a day. Yet she so loved them, that the thought of their poor meal at home clouded her pale face more than once that morning.

Scarcely would a shower of golden sovereigns have been so welcome to those romping urchins as the sight of that little basket, with its thick slices of hot pudding. Hetta stood looking at them and at her mother,—who, by the way, was not forgotten—as all three partook of the unlooked-for delicacy. As for Katherine, her heart would have prompted her to give far more, but her means were quite inadequate to the fulfilment of her wishes in this respect, and, after all, she felt it a privilege to be able to do even this.

Back, then, went the two friends—for friends they were, in spite of difference in age and bodily vigour—and very soon they sat down in the twilight by the fire. Hetta had taken the low stool, and rested her head upon the hand of her kind hostess, while Kate had fallen into

deep but pleasant musing. There was something in the hour and in the stillness which reigned throughout the house—whence nearly all the other lodgers had gone forth to Christmas merry-making of some kind—favourable to quiet meditation. Even little Hetta appeared to be content to gaze into the fire and dream.

As they sat thus, it never occurred to them that passers-by could look into the room, until a slight noise at the window roused them both, and Katherine, rising to let down the blind, saw a man's face pressed close against the pane.

"It is only some rude passenger, dear child. Do not be so frightened. We shall see no more of him."

But the next instant the sound of footsteps in the passage without contradicted her bold words. A hand was laid upon the lock, and the same face presented itself in the doorway. It was very handsome, but a thick moustache and bushy whiskers were by no means in favour with little Hetta, and she clung tremblingly to Katherine.

Still, however, the stranger advanced, until Kate at last found words to express her surprise at this "intrusion;" then he stopped short and with a smile exclaimed, "Do you not know me, Kate?"

The smile explained it all. Another moment and she was in his arms.

"Oh, Howard, Howard!" she sobbed presently, "you did not prepare me for this!"

"No, because I was not prepared myself; and, besides, I have missed so many letters that I did not even know your address; and but for a friend whom I met at the terminus, I should not have found you to-night."

The friend of whom Howard spoke came forward on hearing this, and Kate, raising her head from her brother's shoulder, beheld no less a personage than Mr. Marshall!

And Hetta, she too came to greet the wanderer, and to express her thanks to his new acquaintance. Somehow the moustache soon lost its terror, and the strong arms of the new comer became her frequent support. It was a happy evening. Mr. Marshall, after a little hesitation, having confessed that he lived in lodgings, and had not yet decided how to spend the evening, was prevailed on to remain, and the four sat down to tea.

Howard had much to tell of his success in the last year of his colonial life, of his resolve to settle once more in his native land, of the marriage of his brother, and of messages to Kate—to all which the whole party listened with a rapid attention. Then Kate was called on for her story, to which Mr. Marshall gave, if possible, still greater heed; and by the time the meal was ended, they were all fast friends, and gathered round the fire with eyes dimmed only by the tear of joy.

Dear Kate! her Christmas day was happier than even she had ventured to anticipate. The God in whom she trusted had heaped mercy upon mercy, and her heart was full of thankfulness.

There was no lack of merriment; for Howard found that Hetta's mother was but poor, and ran away to give her Kate's roast beef; at which audacious theft they all laughed heartily. Hetta and Mr. Marshall were "great friends," that is noisy ones, that evening; while, between ourselves, Mr. Marshall became scarcely less a favourite in another quarter, about which he was perhaps more anxious than you think.

Certainly, nobody has any reason to regret the events of that Christmas day. Least of all Mr. Marshall!

A Thought for the New Year.

Let this be a year of greater spirituality. As the holy Joseph Alleine wrote from Ilchester prison to his flock at Taunton:—"Beloved Christians, live like yourselves; let the world see that the promises of God, and privileges of the Gospel, are not empty sounds or a mere crack. Let the heavenly cheerfulness, and the restless diligence, and the holy raisedness of your conversation, prove the reality, and excellency, and beauty of your religion to the world." Aim at an elevated life. Seek to live so near to God that you shall not be overwhelmed by those amazing sorrows which you may soon encounter, nor surprised by that decease which may come upon you in a moment, suddenly. Let prayer never be a form. Always realise it as an approach to the living God for some specific purpose; and learn to watch for the return of prayer. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. That sleep will be sweet, and that awaking hallowed, where a text of Scripture, or a spiritual song, imbues the last thoughts of consciousness. See that you make progress. See, that, when the year is closing, you have not all the evil tempers, and infirmities of character, which presently afflict you; but see to it that if God grant to you to erect the Ebenezer of another closing year, you may be able to look back on radiant spots, where you enjoyed seasons of spiritual refreshment, and victories over enemies, heretofore too strong for you. Happy then the new year! if its path were so bright that in a future retrospect your eye could fix on many a Babel and Babel along its track, and your grateful memory could say, "Yonder is the grave where I buried a long-hered sin; and that stone of memorial marks where God made me to triumph over a fierce temptation, through Jesus Christ. You Sabbath was the top of the hill where I clasped the cross, and the burden fell off my back; and that communion was the land of Babel, where I saw the far-off land, and the King in his beauty."—Dr. Hamilton.