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THE TEACHER.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1873.

SUNDAY, *March 2nd*, 1873.
Escape from Sodom—Gen. xix. 15-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.—For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him. Heb. ii. 2, 3.

COMMIT TO MEMORY.—Verse 17.

SUMMARY.—Sinful associations are dangerous and contaminating. The possession of wealth, if at the sacrifice of piety, is a poor dependance.

ANALYSIS.—Although Lot was pronounced a "righteous man" he was slow to obey to voice of God, 15-18 He was not prepared to obey at all hazards, 19-20 God gave him his own request to remain in Zoar, 21, 22. Lot's wife was not saved by his faith but permitted to perish as a warning to all ages vs. 26.

EXPOSITION.—The previous part of the history of Lot's career is not of the most satisfactory character. Although he is pronounced a righteous man, 2 Peter ii 7, yet in his dealings with his uncle Abraham he appears as selfish and choosing the richest part of the land without regard to the character of those with whom he would have to dwell. Abraham's conduct stands out in striking contrast as noble and generous, notwithstanding that he was the elder, and might very properly have dictated to Lot what part he should take. Lot does not appear to have known anything of Abraham's intercession for him and his family. The narrative of that event, given in the previous chapter, is intimately connected with what subsequently took place, yet appears to have had no influence on the course pursued by the angels, as they appeared to Lot, or, on Lot himself. Neither does Abraham appear to have known how Lot was to be rescued from the ruin which impended over the doomed cities. It was probably the same persons (angels) that had appeared to Abraham who now came to the gate of Sodom in the evening. He recognized them as worthy of his profound reverence, and shewed them the greatest respect and attention, vs. 1 Lot had evidently become greatly corrupted by living in these wicked cities. However "just" he was, he is to be saved only, "so as by fire," and more in consequence of his relation to Abraham than on account of his own worthiness.

Verse 15, 16.—The interest taken by angels in saving Lot and his family is truly angelic. The tardiness of Lot may have arisen from his possessions, or from a desire to see his neighbours saved from the coming destruction. *The iniquity*, or destruction, the cause is here put for the effect. They lost all they had accumulated by living in this luxurious and licentious city, and were only themselves saved as it were by the skin of the teeth. Job xix. 20.

Verse 17.—Abundant warning was given of the danger of continuing to linger and they were fairly put on the course of safety.

Verse 18—Lot still shews his inclination to consult his own convenience, and ask for still further concessions to his love of ease, and disinclination to personal effort. His want of faith and his request for a shortening of the distance to which he might go to be safe, indicates a want of moral courage as well a defective confidence in God. At the same time there appears a degree of humility, and the absence of self confidence, which are indications of genuine piety.

Verse 21, 22.—"I have accepted thee" (thy face) The request presented was granted in consideration of his weakness, and this city would be spared on his account. How full of mercy are God's dealings with his people. Rev. vii. 3.

Verse 23, 24—Whether the cities of the plain were destroyed by the eruption of a volcano at the time, and the bituminous substance falling upon them, or the fire and brimstone were simply a miracle, without any intermediate process, cannot be certainly determined. The facts of their destruction are pretty fully corroborated by the present aspect of the locality. The Dead Sea now covers the plain in which these cities formerly were. Sulphur is found on its shores, and a kind of coal called Musca by the Arabs which on being rubbed exales an intolerable odor. When placed upon hot coals it emits a strong stench of sulphur and will give off a blaze of several inches high. Lieut. Lynch of the United States Navy spent several weeks in 1848 in making a survey of the Dead Sea, and he found it "nearly 1,300 feet deep, and its surface more than 1,300 feet below the level of the Mediterranean From the eastern side, some eight miles from the south end, a low promontory projects three fourths of the way towards the western cliffs, and sends up a point five miles towards the north. Below this point the lake becomes suddenly shallow, the southern bay not averaging more than twelve or fifteen feet in depth, Josh. xv. 2 This lower part is believed to cover the sites of the cities destroyed by fire from heaven, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim. The vale of Siddim was once a smiling plain, well watered, and like a garden of the Lord, Gen. xiii 10; it is now, and for all future ages, a monument of his just indignation, Deut. xxix 23, and an awful warning to reckless sinners that the day of the Lord will come upon them also suddenly and without remedy, Matt. x. 15; xi. 22-24; 2 Pet ii. 4 9; Jude 7. The bottom of the shallow bay is a deep slimy mud, Gen. xiv. 10. On its southwest border lies a mountain or ridge composed chiefly of rock-salt, and called Usdum or Sodom, between which and the sea stands a round pillar of salt forty feet high, reminding one of Lot's wife. At present the Dead sea has no perceptible outlet, and the waters poured into it by the Jordan are probably evaporated by the intense heat of the unclounded sun, or in part absorbed in the earth.'

Verse 25.—The sterility of the soil to this day confirms these historical statements.

Verse 26—We are not informed what induced Lot's wife to look back. It may have been that she lingered, and a mass of the liquid substance surrounded her, and this judgment fell upon her for the purpose of hastening the others on in their obedience to the divine command. Our Lord calls attention to the fact, and inculcates a remembrance of it upon his disciples to induce a spirit of watchfulness, and preparedness for the coming of the Son of man.

QUESTIONS—What relation existed between Abraham and Lot? What spirit had Lot shown in his treatment of Abraham? How had Abraham shown his regard for Lot? Chap. xiv. 12 16; xviii. 17-33. Where was Lot when the angels met him? How had he received them? How did Lot obey the injunctions to escape from Sodom? (16) What was the injunction given on coming to the suburbs of the city? Did Lot obey forthwith? Where did he wish to go rather than to the mountain? Why? What did this shew? What time was it when the destruction fell on the cities? Luke xvii 28-29? What are the leading features of the localities where these cities formerly stood? What judgment fell upon Lot's wife? Why? What may have been the object of this besides that of punishment of disobedience?

Scripture Catechism, 103.

SUNDAY. *March 9th*.—Trial of Abram's Faith.—Gen. xxii 7-14.

Youths' Department.

POVERTY PETER.

BY R. W. RAYMOND *

Certainly nobody in all the great city was more lonesome, and desolate, and helpless than Poverty Peter. I will not say that nobody was more unhappy; for there were so many unhappy people in the city, and there are so many kinds of unhappiness, that it would be hard to decide among them. Some folks are furiously miserable. They are full of jealousy, and hate, and envy. They try to do harm, and the evil they intend for others comes back upon themselves—their own passions torment them. So no wonder they suffer. Some folks are made wretched by remorse. They have done wicked things which cannot be undone. All their tears will not quite wash the stains from their souls, and give them pure and happy memories. Some folks, again, are unhappy because they have to work too hard, and it takes all the strength, and hope, and comfort out of their lives; while others are unhappy because they have nothing to do. This makes them selfish and discontented. A little starvation, just to wake them up and make them pay attention to life, would be good for such people; but too much starvation is not good for anybody.

Now, Poverty Peter was unhappy without knowing it, and I think that is, in some respects, the worst kind of all. For these different kinds of unhappiness are like different diseases. Most of them are painful, and people are warned by the pain to try to be cured of them. But a disease that doesn't give any pain at all is a dreadful thing. When the sick man tells the doctor that he doesn't suffer a bit, the doctor shakes his head. That is a bad sign. He is afraid the man will die.

Poverty Peter got his name from the newsboys. They called him so because he hadn't any respectable name of his own, and that one fitted him perfectly. Not that they thought it any disgrace to be poor. Bless you, every mother's son of them was poor when he began, though some of them, having been in business several years, had money in the bank. But even these looked as ragged as Peter. They did not follow the fashions (except at the distance of half a generation), and they did not judge one another by outward appearances. But they noticed that Peter had no ambition, no hope, no wish to better his condition. He didn't work; he didn't play; he managed to live, no one knew how; and he seemed to care as little about life as if he were an oyster at the bottom of the East River. So the leader of the newsboys—they called him Barefoot Bill when he went into the trade, but he thrashed that out of them after he had earned his first pair of shoes, and now his name was Captain Williams—said of Peter, "Poverty Peter he is, and will be. It's in him, and you can't get it out of him!' Peter did not mind this treatment. When he was hungry, he wanted to eat; when he was cold, he wanted to get warm. That was his notion of life. He saw thousands of people every day who were busy, and good-natured, and comfortable; but he looked upon them without envy and without ambition, as a rock might look up at a bird flying over it. They belonged to a different world from his.

One winter Sunday he was loafing along the street and he came to a church. The door was open, and out of it came the deep tones of the organ—that sort of organ-sound, you know, in which something below all seems to shake and tremble sweetly, till the whole world trembles with it; while on the surface of the music all the time beautiful melodies float about, like yachts upon a billowy sea. Something urged Peter to go in, but he hesitated. It was not because he was dirty and ragged that he paused; he had no special shame about that as yet, but he was lazy and indifferent. While he lingered, however, the people were going by him into the church, and presently there passed a little girl, oh, so beautiful! It made even Peter catch his breath to look at her.

No, she didn't have golden hair and blue eyes. You think all the little girls in stories are blondes; but this one had brown hair—a little tinged with red, if anything—and her eyes were brown too But her beauty did not depend on these things alone. I think two things had more to do with it. She looked so happy and she looked so kind. And what should she do but let go of her father's hand, walk straight up to Peter, and, after looking at him with her earnest eyes for a moment, put into his hand a card with a pretty picture on it. Then she swiftly ran to overtake her father, and disappeared in the church.

Peter looked at the card with curiosity and amazement. The picture represented a fair and gracious woman giving presents to a crowd of wretched, shabby people; under it was the word CHARITY, in large letters, and under that, again, a text from the Bible. But he could not read, and so the meaning was lost upon him. In fact, he thought it was a ticket to some exhibition in the church, and it struck him that perhaps there would be presents given away. There were people who gave presents and other people who got them. But even this thought did not move him to enter. What moved him was just a look of pity thrown back upon him by the little girl before she disappeared. He started forward, hardly knowing why he did so. He had only a vague desire to catch one more such glance. You may think it strange that pity should be welcome to him. Indeed, the ordinary kind of pity was not at all to his taste. He had been pitied that way often enough, and it made him feel as, I suppose, the animals in the menagerie feel when you poke them with a parasol. But this was an extraordinary kind; it was pity without any contempt. Few people feel it, and even these do not often have the art to show it so that it cannot be misunderstood.

So on rushed Poverty Peter, and found himself in the church before he had time to consider. The little girl was just entering a pew far up the aisle. He did not dare to follow farther; his sudden impulse died away, and he was about to slink out into the street again, when the cushioned seat in the empty rear pew attracted his attention. Sitting down was just in his line, and it was his habit to take advantage of soft places when they presented themselves, which was not often, in his desolate life So now he sidled into the pew, thinking. "I'll stay here while they'll let me. Probably a policeman will come along pretty soon, and tell me to 'move out o' this.'"

But nobody disturbed him, and he began to feel quite at home. He could just see the little girl's head in the distance, and he longed for her to come out again. The music pleased him, and the prayer puzzled him; but the sermon—well, for a wonder, the sermon was just suited to Poverty Peter's case. I suppose he might have dropped into church a hundred times without hearing anything which fitted his condition so well. It was about giving and receiving; and after talking plainly to rich people concerning the duty and the reward of charity, the minister went on somewhat in this style:

"But, my friends, if it is indeed more blessed to give than to receive, how shall the poor obtain this greater blessing? Ah! the promise is just as true for them as for the rich. Even the poorest can give, and he will not be happy until he does. Give, and not take, or at least do not take without giving, no matter how poor you are It may be right for you to let others help you, but it is certainly right and necessary that you also help others.

"Now, I don't mean that you should necessarily hunt out people that are lower down than you. You can find chances to serve those that are above you. If you are a clerk, do your employer a favor; if you are a laborer in the street, behave like a gentleman to those who pass you in the street. Do not scorn, nor envy, nor neglect the people who seem to be better off than you are. Show them free and friendly favor, and you will find that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Even God, in whose presence we are weak as cripples and poor as beggars, who is always giving and giving, permits us to offer our loving gifts to him. And serving him without selfishness or hope of reward, we shall be paid by the privilege of the service itself.

"Oh, disheartened, indifferent, unhappy men! Do you not know the secret of pleasure? Arise, and do something for other men! Do not any longer be content to receive, and receive—and give nothing. Whatever you have, money or strength or good-will, give, and give freely and perpetually, and you shall be blest"

Peter listened with strange interest, feeling that this was meant for him, and understanding enough of it to be deeply moved. He was so absorbed that when the minister said "Arise!" he stood right up in the pew; but immediately he sat down again, muttering, "No; that ain't it! Oh dear! what *is* it?"

The closing hymn began, but Peter was so full of the riddle in his mind that the music only troubled him; and he quietly stole out of church, and stood again on the steps, feeling somehow that he had been greatly changed since he stood there an hour before. He kept saying to himself, "Arise, and do somebody a favor! It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The carriages of the rich people were gathering before the church, and waiting for the service to be over. The sun shone brightly, but coldly, on the icy street; and Poverty Peter looked around, in a vague way, half hoping that somebody would appear, some splendid person, gleaming in the sun, to whom he could render a favor. Then he thought of the lovely little girl in the church. If he could do something for her! He looked down at the card she had given him. He had crumpled it up in his hand, and forgotten all about it. Now he smoothed it out with reverent care, and after trying all his pockets, and finding a hole as big as his fist in every one of them—in fact, you might say, no bottom at all in any of them—he put it in his cap, and stopped the principal hole in that with his head.

Then the people began to come out of church, and Peter forgot his perplexities for a moment in watching for the appearance of the little girl. At last she came and stood on the uppermost step, like a beautiful bird, just ready to fly. She saw Peter, too, and turned towards him with the loveliest smile; but, alas! at that very instant her foot slipped, and before any one could catch her, she fell down the steps and across the icy sidewalk, and right before a pair of prancing horses which were just coming up to the front of the church. People shrieked, and cried "Look out!" and "Oh! the child!" but nobody did anything, except Peter. His eyes were upon her when she fell; he made but one jump from where he stood to where she lay; and in a second he had snatched her unhurt from before the horses' hoofs, and carried her in his arms to the sidewalk. There she was received by a sympathizing crowd of ladies. One said, "Poor dear! don't try to stand up; let me hold you!" One said, "What a mercy she wasn't killed—that sky-blue sash is spoilt!" Nobody noticed Peter at first; but the little girl broke away from them all, and called out to her father, who was but just hurrying out of church, and had not seen the accident, but had heard the outcry, "I am not hurt at all, papa, and *he* pulled me out!"

Poverty Peter stood a little apart, still gazing on the little girl, and so proud, to think that he had done something for somebody, and such a something for such a somebody! The gentleman turned toward him eagerly, to express his gratitude for the salvation of his daughter; but when he saw only a slouching, ragged boy, he seemed to think that fine words would be wasted on him unless something more substantial went with them; so he put his hand in his pocket and took out a banknote, with which he approached Peter. But Peter, observing for the first time what the gentleman intended, felt suddenly insulted. I don't think he had ever felt insulted before, and he was not very angry now; but it seemed a kind of disappointment. He was so happy and he didn't want to be paid. He drew himself up, not knowing exactly what to say, and involuntarily he said the very best thing in the world for that occasion—the sentence that was running in his head—"It is more blessed to give than to receive."

The gentleman started, looked at him again, put the money back in his pocket, and said, with a smile: "My boy, you have remembered the sermon better than I. I will not offer to pay you; but you have done me the greatest service that any man could do, and I thank you with all my heart. Will you favor me by coming tomorrow morning to my office? It is in that building yonder, with a marble front."

Poverty Peter was so embarrassed with shame and joy together that he could not speak a word. He dashed across the street, ran into an alley and stood on his hands in the snow a full minute, flourishing his legs in the air to express his happiness. When he resumed that position which people, for reasons of convenience, usually occupy—namely, right side up—he saw, laying in the snow, the card which he had put in his cap. You see, the lid of that cap was loose. It was not a suitable cap to be used as a pocket by a young man with his heels in the air; and so out came the card. Peter looked at it with new curiosity and gushing gratitude. Then, taking a sudden resolution, back he ran to the church, and found everybody gone, except the sexton, who was shutting up the doors, and the minister, who was coming down the steps. The minister noticed his look of disappointment, and said, "What is it that you want?"

"I want to know what this is," said Poverty Peter.

"That?" said the minister; "that's a card, with a picture of Charity on it, and some words from the Bible under the picture."

"What does it say?" inquired Peter.

"It says, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'" replied the minister.

"That's *so*!" said Peter, with such startling emphasis that the minister looked at him curiously. He was too much interested, however, to mind being looked at. "That's so," he repeated; "and if that's in the Bible, I'll bet on the Bible every time! Look here; you said it in there; and I came out and found it so, the first thing. But I guess I've got to the end of my giving. Don't see any more chances to pick pretty girls out of the streets—*wasn't* she lovely, though!"

The minister had heard of the rescue, and understood not only what Peter was talking about but how he felt; and when Peter added, with some hesitation, "You don't know of anything I can do for *you*, do you?" he replied, very politely, "Yes, sir, if you will be kind enough to walk a little way with me, and carry this umbrella, I shall be much obliged to you!" Oh, that sly minister! he only wanted to encourage the boy's self-respect and manli-

* This story was read during the Christmas week to the children of the three Sunday-schools connected with Plymouth Church, Brooklyn.