

The Christian Messenger.

HALIFAX, N.S., JANUARY 6, 1875.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Heroes and Judges.

SUNDAY, January 10th, 1875.—Crossing the Jordan.—Joshua iii. 14-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee.”—Isa. xlii. 2.

THE CONNECTION.—Joshua was greatly encouraged by the words of Jehovah which formed the subject of the preceding lesson. He immediately began his preparations for an active campaign. Calling the officers of the Israelites together, he issued orders that the people should provide food and hold themselves in readiness to cross the Jordan on the third day. He also sent two spies across the river, commanding them to make an inspection of the land immediately opposite, and also of Jericho. These men, owing to the watchfulness of the heathen authorities, were detained longer than had been anticipated; and they made a narrow escape from death. But the very vigilance of the foe proved his apprehension; and the conclusion which it suggested was confirmed by Rahab, who frankly stated that her people were filled with consternation at the prospect of the approaching war, having heard of the miraculous passage of the Red Sea, and the destruction of Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites, on the east of the Jordan. The march to the Jordan seems to have occupied the larger part of the day; and the people camped upon the shore. It is probable that they remained here for three days, Josh. iii. 2. The ark of the covenant was to proceed first. The whole nation was to follow, leaving a space, however, of about a thousand yards, or nearly three-quarters of a mile, between the sacred symbol of the divine presence and those who came after it, in order that all might observe the way which it led them, not obscuring it by pressing about it in a mass, Josh. iii. 4. The people were also instructed to sanctify themselves by special religious observances in view of the miracle about to be wrought, Josh. iii. 5. The preparations for the crossing were completed by the selection of twelve men, one from each tribe, to carry from the spot where the priests should stand during the passage, twelve memorial stones, to be deposited as a monument in the place which should be selected for the first encampment after the wonderful event, Josh. iii. 12.

Where were the Israelites encamped before the forward movement?—The place is called Shittim, that is, *Acacias*, in Josh. ii. 1, and Abel-shittim, *The Meadow of Acacias*, in Num. xxviii. 40.

The Israelites were in this delightful spot when Balaam looked down upon them, Num. chs. 22-24. Its fertility and the softness of its climate may have rendered them more susceptible to the temptations presented by the crafty Midianites and Moabites, Num. ch. 25; xxi. 16. It was from this place that the twelve thousand marched forth to destroy those with whom they had previously held such sinful friendship, Num. ch. 31.

The miracle of the lesson is the first brought to our notice in the present series of lessons. Miracles have been defined as contraventions of natural law. We distinguish three periods of miraculous display: the first was the period of the Exodus and the conquest of Palestine, when miracles seemed necessary to the accomplishment of the divine purpose; the second was during the lives of Elijah and Elisha, when corruption and idolatry had almost put out the light of Israel; and the third was during the infancy of the Christian dispensation. Thus, Moses, Elijah and Christ were fitly associated on the mount of transfiguration, as the representatives of great crises in the world's history.

The design of the miracle is to arrest attention and provoke investigation of its cause. Inasmuch as the cause can not be found in the laws of matter, nor in the laws of the human mind, it must be sought in a presence higher than either.

EXPOSITION.—14. *Broke up.* The original expression means primarily to pull up, and it is used with reference to tent-pins, which are pulled up when a tent is to be moved.

Tents. The Arab tent is called *beit*, house; its covering consists of stuff about three-quarters of a yard broad, made of black goat's-hair, Cant. i. 5, laid parallel

with the tent's length. This is sufficient to resist the heaviest rain. The tent-poles are usually nine in number, placed in three groups; but many tents have only one pole; others two or three, Judg. iv. 21; Gen. xxiv. 67 xxxi. 33; Is. xxxviii. 12.

Priests. Those who had the privilege of drawing near to God, whilst others remained afar off. The priesthood had its origin in the patriarchal age, when the father of the household, or, at his death, the eldest son, not only ruled it, but offered up prayers and sacrifices in its behalf, Gen. xli. 8; xviii. 23; xvi. 25; xxxiii. 20; xxvii. 15; Job i. 5.

It is evident from Ex. v. 1, 3 and xix. 22 that there was a special order of priests among the Israelites before the appointment of Aaron and his sons; but we know nothing of its organization.

Bearing. The priests did not usually perform this office, the Levites having been set apart to it, 1 Chron. xv. 2. On this occasion, probably because it was one of the most important in the history of Israel, the priests departed from their custom, and themselves bore the ark.

Ark. The original word means a box or coffer, Gen. i. 26; 2 Kings xli. 9, 10; 2 Chron. xxiv. 8. Another term is employed with reference to the ark of Noah and that of Moses. Estimating the Hebrew cubit at eighteen inches, the Ark of the Testimony was a box three feet nine inches long, two feet three inches wide and two feet three inches in depth. It was made of acacia wood, and was overlaid within and without with pure gold. It supported the mercy-seat where were the cherubim from between which God communed with his people, Ex. xxv. 22. Because it contained the Tables of the Law, or the Testimony, it is most frequently termed in Exodus the Ark of the Testimony.

The covenant. The two tables of stone containing the ten commandments, and deposited in the ark.

Before the people. There was a space between the ark and the people of about three-quarters of a mile, so that all could see the sacred symbol of the divine presence, Josh. 34.

15. The feet. . . in the brim. The ark was the symbol of Jehovah's presence, his peculiar dwelling-place. It contained the expression of his will graven upon stones.

Jordan overfloweth all its banks at the time of harvest. The Jordan is frequently brim-full in harvest time. The Jordan flows at the bottom of a deep valley, which descends to the water's edge on either side in two, occasionally in three terraces. Within the lowest of these the stream, ordinarily less than one hundred feet wide in this lower part of its course, is confined. The margin is overgrown with a jungle of tamarisks and willows, the covert, during the latter months of the year, of wild beasts. But in the Spring-time these thickets are reached by the rising water, Jer. xlix. 19; i. 44; and the river, occasionally at least, fills the ravine which forms its proper bed to the brim. By the middle of April there would have been several weeks of hot weather, and the snows of Hermon would be melted.

The exact date of the miracle is given in Josh. iv. 19; it was the tenth day of the first month, nearly the first of April. It was thus the anniversary of the day on which the paschal lamb had been selected in Egypt, Ex. xii. 3; for it was the completion of that of which the selection of the lamb was the beginning, the deliverance of the Israelites, and their occupation of their own land. They had time to establish themselves in their new encampment and to celebrate the Passover on the proper day, the 14th of the first month.

16. Rose up upon a heap. So deep is the depression through which the Jordan flows from the Lake of Galilee to the probable site of this miracle, that the arrest and unheaping of its waters for many hours would not cause extensive overflowing of the adjacent country.

Beside Zareton. We cannot identify these sites. Knobel supposes that Adam was situated in the neighborhood of the present ford of Damieh, near to which the remains of a bridge belonging to the Roman era are still to be found. The distance of Kurn Sartabeh from Jericho is a little more than fifteen miles, which tallies very well with the expression “very far.”

The sea. Known now, though never in the Scriptures, as the Dead Sea, into which the Jordan flows. It is called the Salt Sea, Deut. iii. 7; Josh. iii. 16; xii. 3.

Were cut off. The descent of the Jordan is remarkably rapid. It has a fall of 15 feet per mile of its crooked channel, or 25 feet per mile of its direct distance. Hence

the waters passed away with extreme rapidity.

The people passed over. The crossing may have consumed several hours. The armed men, of course, would immediately establish themselves on the opposite side: the warriors of the tribes which had chosen the territory on the east of the Jordan led the way, Josh. iv. 12; the rest of the nation followed.

Jericho. The name probably means *place of fragrance*. “Almost every reed in these regions distills a sugary juice, and almost every herb breathes fragrance.” The city was of great antiquity, Josh. iii. 16; xii. 9-25. Near it Solomon had a foundry, 2 Chron. vi. 17. From a place over against it, beyond Jordan, Elijah was translated, 2 Kings ii. 1-22. On the rocky height which overhangs it, tradition locates our Lord's last and first temptation, Matt. iv. 1-4; and near it, in the Jordan, his baptism, Matt. iii. 13-17.

17. Stood firm. Where lately rolled an overwhelming flood.

In the midst. The people were thus assured that the current would not burst down upon them to sweep them away.

This miracle in some respects resembles that by which the Israelites were delivered at the Red Sea. Typically, it refers to the passage of the soul into the heavenly Canaan when the pilgrimage of life is closed.

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS.—God not only accompanies his people; but he goes before them, assuring them a safe way, vs. 14. *The ark before the people.*

God will open the way; as the Jordan was not parted by the touch of priestly feet, but by divine power. To God belongs the glory of the Christian's salvation.

Those alone who go forward in God's name, bearing his covenant in their hearts by faith, shall enter the land of promise.

We must follow our ministers only as they follow Christ.

The parting of the Jordan represents a happy death, and the possession of Canaan the blessed experience in eternity.

WHAT COURTESY DID.

There was a very plainly dressed, elderly lady, who was a frequent customer at the then leading dry goods store in Boston. No one in the store knew her, even by name. All the clerks but one avoided her, and gave their attention to those who were better dressed and more pretentious. The exception was one young man, who had a conscientious regard for duty and system. He never left another customer to wait on the lady, but when at liberty he waited upon her with as much attention as though she had been a princess. This continued for a year or two, until the young man became of age. One morning the lady approached the young man, when the following conversation took place:

Lady:—“Young man, do you want to go into business for yourself?”

“Yes, ma'am,” he responded; “but I have neither money, credit nor friends, nor will any one trust me.”

“Well,” continued the lady, “you go and select a good location, ask what the rent is, and report to me”—handing the young man her address.

The young man went, found a capital location, and good store, but the landlord required security, which he could not give. Mindful of the lady's request, he forthwith went to her and reported.

“Well,” she replied, “you go and tell Mr. —, that I will be responsible.”

He went, and the landlord, or agent, was surprised, but the bargain was closed. The next day the lady called to ascertain the result. The young man told her, but added, “What am I to do for goods? No one will trust me.”

“You may go and see Mr. —, and Mr. —, and Mr. —, and tell them to call on me.”

He did, and his store was soon stocked with the best goods in the market. There are many in this city who remember the circumstances and the man, says a Boston paper. He died many years since, and left a fortune of \$300,000. So much for politeness and so much for treating one's elders with the deference due to age, in whatever garb they are clothed.

At a collection recently made at a charity fair, a lady passing the plate to a very wealthy man who was well known for his stinginess. “I have nothing,” was his curt reply. “Then take something, sir,” she answered, “you know I am begging for the poor.”

People of good sense are those whose opinions agree with ours.

Youths' Department.



WISHING AND DOING;

OR

WAITING FOR THE NEW YEAR.

BY MRS. DAWSON BURNS.

“I wish it was New Year's Day,” said a young girl in a languid, fretful voice, as she slowly lifted herself from the sofa where she had been lounging and reading for some hours.

“Why?” was the ready question of her sister, looking up from a drawing she was carefully finishing, intending it as a present to her father, who, after a long absence, was expected home in a month.

“Why? because I hope to begin in the New Year a regular course of work and study. I shall keep a diary, putting down the employments of every hour, improve my French, which I have almost forgotten; practice my music, for I've so neglected it that all my fingers are like thumbs on the piano. Mamma too shall have the long-promised group of flowers for the drawing-room; I'll make the knitted quilt for the spare bed room, work Albert his slippers; in short, do all sorts of good and useful things for myself and others if only 1874 will make haste and begin;” here she flung herself back; quite exhausted with her long speech.

“Why wait for next year, Mary?”

“Oh, because it's perfectly useless my trying now to do much. I like to have a system and begin in an orderly manner and at orderly times. See how pleasant it will be writing January 1st, 1874, and then add a list of the day's doings and so on during the 365 days of the year.”

“Yes, Mary, such a plan as yours would be very good indeed; but I cannot understand why you should not begin at once; there are now eight weeks to the year's end, and I am inclined to think if your system of work by rule is to succeed, it will require some previous preparation. What say you to our beginning at once, this very day, and see how much we can accomplish by the end of the next two months?”

Both the girls were silent for some time, the one resuming her book, the other putting a few more touches to her drawing.

I cannot do better in the interval of their silence than give a sketch of the sisters. The conversation was carried on in the schoolroom of Captain Smith's house; the two daughters had ceased to receive lessons, and were considered grown up and educated. The room had been prettily refurnished for their sole use, and was now named the “Girl's Study,” but it more often had the dear old pet like name of “school room.” Looking at the two sisters, one of them mounted on a high stool facing her easel, flushed with pleasurable excitement in beholding the picture of a woodland scene grow more perfect under her busy, skilful hand, the other lazily stretching herself among the cushions of the sofa devouring a novel,—one would not fail to perceive they formed a great contrast. The eldest daughter, a tall, fair girl, had every advantage of fine health and good abilities, acquired most things more rapidly than any of her school-fellows, but sadly wanted stability of purpose and perseverance in her pursuits. Moved by the promptings of a free and careless nature, she yielded to the whim of the moment, thinking of no future, and quite reckless as to the results. Slowly and surely she was losing all that careful instruction that had been so liberally bestowed on her; for, though the Smiths were not rich, yet by an arrangement with a few families in the neighborhood whose daughters shared in the studies, the best teachers were obtained. The youngest sister was a quiet delicate girl, often prostrated by severe illness—one of those gentle beings likely to be overlooked in a circle where show and parade take the place of solid worth. Few among their friends had thought it worth while to notice “little Sunny.” To them the clash and chatter of the eldest Miss Smith was far more agreeable, and as she would give a very racy description of the latest sensational novel, or please their ears by tripping over the newest song, no one

troubled themselves to dive deeper into Mary's character. “Just the girl to spend an evening with,” was the usual comment.

Owing to Ellen's frequent indisposition, she found it often very difficult to keep pace with Mary's rapid learning, and the teachers were often proud enough to call Ellen's attention to her “brilliant sister,” as they styled her. Yet step by step she made great progress, and laid the basis of a solid education, not relapsing one bit when the schooldays were over, gathering up the scraps of time and using them as a means of enriching her mind, so that she was really what you would call a highly cultivated girl. And there were one or two old friends of Captain Smith who loved to draw out the little maid, and felt fully recompensed when the timidity passed off and the low, sweet voice was heard reading some beautiful passages from our best authors, or, in her touching notes singing the old songs dear still to the lovers of true music. Then what a household treasure she was: Father, mother, sister, and brothers—ah! even the servants—felt the sweet influences of her gentle disposition, ever ready with hand and heart to render help and sympathy in all times of difficulty, so that many a domestic wrinkle was smoothed out and chased away by her loving, winning ways.

Mary, with all her follies, was right loyal in her love to her sister, and often when fits of contrition came on for her foolish waste of time she would throw her arms round her and say, “Oh little Sunny, I wish I was like you.” Even now, as they are quietly indulging in their different employments, Mary, though appearing to read, is really thinking of Ellen's words and drawing a contrast between her own flitting habits and little “Sunny's” steady efforts at self-improvement; she knew, too, that by a systematic plan Ellen had found time for showing much kindness to the poor of the village.

“And all with her delicate health,” she exclaimed so loudly that her sister looked up in amazement and said:

“What are you talking about, Mary—is the heroine of your book an invalid?”

“No! no! Nelly, I was thinking about you, dear. I am free to confess once again, I wish I was like you.”

Ellen jumped off her stool, and coming to the sofa, said:

“Talking will make neither of us better; are you willing to try my plan?”

Away went the book nearly up to the ceiling, up started Mary, sending the cushions in all directions, “Yes! yes! yes! I'll begin this very moment,” and the two girls signed the compact by a right sisterly kiss.

Captain Smith's return home was delayed by severe weather till within a little more than a week of the New Year, and there were great preparations made for his coming. He was to receive an unusual welcome, because the family had felt greater anxiety on his account. Mary had carefully kept to her resolution for the entire time, planning each hour's work, and creating not a little astonishment in the household by the length of her “busy fit,” as they termed it. None knew the secret of her resolve but the gentle Ellen, who was ready at all times to cheer her sister in her flagging moments.

Joy beamed on every face when the sailor husband and father followed the telegram he had sent the day of his ship's arrival at Liverpool. Albert was home from college and the younger brothers had arrived from school.

When the excitement of meeting each other had passed off and tea was over, Captain Smith gathered with his wife and children round the drawing room fire, and related to them some perilous adventures he had encountered on the great deep.

“And now,” said he, “tell me something of yourselves; I am longing to hear land news, home news.”

Albert was all eager to recount college work, Charles and Harry rushed off to get copy books, reports and prizes, all of which were duly inspected and approved.

“Well, girls! you're very quiet,” said the Captain; “but I presume Mary thinks it will take too long to run through her list of novels. I must wait for that till our first long walk; but Sunny, surely you have something to interest me in?”

“Oh! papa, do let me tell you, first of all, that Mary's had no time lately for novel reading; look over the piano, dear papa.”

Getting up hastily he saw, side by side, the finished picture of the woodland scene, and a beautiful group of flowers and fruit. “A small token of affection to our beloved parents from Mary and Ellen,” was written on a card underneath.