

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

STUDIES ABOUT THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

SUNDAY, April 22nd, 1877.—Gehazi the Leper.—2 Kings v. 20-27.

COMMIT TO MEMORY. Vs. 25-27.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"He that is greedy of gain, troubleth his own house." Prov. xv. 57.

DAILY READING.—Monday, 2 Kings v. 15-19. Tuesday, vs. 20; Exodus xx. 1-17. Wednesday, vs. 21; Acts v. 1-11. Thursday, vs. 22; 1 John iii. 8-24. Friday, vs. 23; John xii. 1-8. Saturday, Genesis xiii. Sunday, Psalm cxxxix.

ANALYSIS.—I. A Covetous eye. Vs. 20. II. Covetous steps. Vs. 21. III. Covetous fraud. Vs. 22-25. IV. Discovery and punishment. Vs. 26, 27.

QUESTIONS.—What events immediately followed Naaman's cure? What gift did he offer Elisha? Why? By what case of conscience was he troubled? How did Elisha answer him?

Vs. 20. What does Gehazi say as he sees Naaman depart? Why does he call him "this Syrian"? How was he unlike Elisha?

Vs. 21. By what in this verse does Naaman's humble and grateful nobleness appear?

Vs. 22. What cunning falsehood does Gehazi now utter?

Vs. 23. How great was Naaman's generosity? Why did Gehazi need to be urged?

Vs. 24. Where was this tower or hill? Why did Gehazi bid these servants of Naaman adieu here?

Vs. 25. How does he continue his deception?

Vs. 26. Had he at all deceived the prophet? Where is there in this lesson a covetous eye? Where a spirit of contempt? Where was Gehazi's first falsehood? Where his second? Where his third?

Vs. 27. What was his punishment? Was it any too severe?

The events immediately following Naaman's cure are of great interest. Naaman returns to Elisha convinced that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel; then offers the presents which Eastern courtesy should have led him to do at the outset; in refusing which, Elisha is entreated to bestow a gift of two mules' burden of earth, probably of the land of Israel; not a little superstition remaining in one whose religious convictions were so recent. Then Naaman utters a vow of perpetual fidelity to the God of Israel. A question of conscience, however, follows upon an act of civil service to the king of Syria, but not of personal religious character. It is significant to notice that the prophet leaves Naaman's convictions to work out their own effects. If men are true to God and Christ and his church, their conscientious scruples will quickly and readily adjust themselves. See vs. 15-19. Now follows Gehazi's sin and punishment.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 20.—Behold my master, etc. This he "said," though only in the secret silence of his own heart. That was there said which he would not have ventured to speak out into another's ear. To Gehazi Elisha's conduct must have seemed foolish. The opportunity was splendid, the very best of the prophet's life. Besides, Gehazi would naturally have shared in the gifts, and so he was disappointed as well as surprised. His feelings were very much akin to those of Judas. John xii. 4-6. But as the Lord [Jehovah] liveth, etc. We have found this form of oath used several times when it was suitable and justifiable, but here, though expressing as elsewhere resolute purpose, it is peculiar and shocking, as confirming a wicked purpose.

Verse 21.—Followed after. Promptly acting, most commendable if the action had been honorable. When Naaman saw him, etc. The general showed the prophet's servant this marked honor for the prophet's sake, not suspecting that the servant was not truly representing his master. The conduct of Naaman was as honorable as that of Gehazi was disgraceful, and is but one of ten thousand proofs that the best opportunities do not always produce the best men; that many a nominal Christian shall, "in the judgment," be condemned by a heathen. Luke x. 12, 14. From the sacred circle of the twelve Judas went to "his own place," which was not the place of the others, prepared for them

by the Master. Naaman's inquiry is in the usual terms of friendly courtesy. iv. 26.

Verse 22.—*All is well.* Yes, in one way, but in another all is ill. *My master hath sent me.* This is a downright, outright lie. Truth was suppressed. *Saying behold, etc.* The next lie is in asserting that his master said what follows, and an implied lie additional is that his master would be reported to Naaman as saying it. The story which is told is also a lie, made up by Gehazi, without the least basis of fact, as, so far as appears, no two young men had come from mount Ephraim to Elisha. But to these lies we must add the rascality of virtual forgery, making a claim in his master's name which the master had given him no sort of authority to make. Besides, this was a gross abuse of the prophet's friendly confidence in Gehazi. It was also a dishonoring of the nation which, as our last lesson showed, was concerned very specially in this matter. But, worst of all, it was a very special and manifest insult to Jehovah, in whose name Elisha acted and whom he represented, and especially in the eyes of Naaman and of the Syrian nation. The "two changes" were requested because he had said they were for the "two young men."

Verse 23.—*Be content, take two talents.* More exactly "willing," was a persuasion for Gehazi not to insist upon so small a sum as one talent. He was able to make a false show, unless we adopt the suggestion below. *Laid them upon two of his servants, etc.* The silver talent weighing 93½ pounds avoirdupois would, with one "change of garment," make a very fair burden for one man. Very likely Gehazi had not counted on such an act of courtesy as that of sending back these bearers of the gift. He may perhaps have limited his request to one talent so that he could himself carry it without help, and thus more easily escape detection and exposure. This may have had to do with his unwillingness to receive the two talents.

Verse 24.—*When he came to the tower.* For "tower" the margin reads "secret place." Both renderings are incorrect, as the Hebrew word means *hill*. "The hill" seems to have been some well known hill which stood before the prophet's house, so as to cut off his view of the road, and so of Gehazi's movements. Dismissing them thus was in danger of waking their suspicion, as it certainly would have been the most natural thing (if all was right) to have taken the gifts immediately to the prophet's door. But this was the best that could be done in the dilemma.

Verse 25.—*He went in and stood before his master.* He had succeeded. His plan worked admirably. It was a very shrewd operation. The golden opportunity had left him a golden harvest. *Whence comest thou, Gehazi.* Or better, "Whence, Gehazi?" He stands there for judgment, as all shall soon stand before him whose eye is flame. But he must hide his fear, if fear he has, *Thy servant went no whither.* Lying still, lying to the last, lies his only covert, his only hope. The liar can have none other than "a refuge of lies."

Verse 26.—*Went not my heart, etc.* Ah, Gehazi, "Thy sin has found thee out," and so soon. God's eye saw all that was done by thee, and God's Spirit is in his prophet to vindicate both his own and his prophet's honor. Ye successful deceivers of your fellow men, who lie yourselves into wealth, and fame, and power, behold! As he was, so shall you soon be. Soon, for life's day is short. Death is near, and "after death the judgment." *Is it a time to receive, etc.* Justifying himself for declining Naaman's gifts, and so carrying the strongest possible condemnation of Gehazi.

Verse 27.—*The leprosy of Naaman, etc.* A case of poetic justice terribly severe, yet justice. Children share in the results of parents' sin. This law still holds, and whatever in it may seem hard, and be beyond our power or explanation, the fact is undeniable, and ought to influence parents to walk all the more carefully in the commandments of God. *He went out, etc.* The penalty came at once with the sentence. The man's hope was blasted. His success was his ruin.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, April 29th, 1877.—Elisha at Dothan.—2 Kings vi. 8-18.

Select Serial.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. X.—A LAST GOOD-NIGHT.

Dora did not attempt to lengthen her conversation with Matthew, after putting in a small plea for his birds; for, much as she would have liked to talk to him about many things, she did not feel equal to the task. So she allowed the theme to drop, vaguely hoping that she might be able to renew it at some more favourable time; and putting out her hand, she said, "I'll wish you good-night, now. And allow me to thank you once more for your very great kindness. You are sending us home happy and content."

"Well, that's a great thing to say," replied Matthew, his face lighting up with genuine pleasure. "But, I'm sure it takes little enough to make ye happy and content, if a bit of stranger's food and fire have done that for ye to-night. You're hearty welcome, and I'll be glad if you'll look in again on the same errand, when you feels to want a bite for yerself or the little chap again."

He just touched Dora's outstretched hand like one who had forgotten how to shake hands through want of practice; and as she repeated her thanks for his offer of future help, he felt drawn nearer to human-kind than he had done for many a long year, and there was a sound of regret in his tone as he wished her good-night, and a look of regret in his eyes as he looked out of the door after the retreating figures.

"Very likely I shan't never set eyes on either of 'em again," he said, as he turned back into his shop. He looked round at his birds, felt a strange discontent with himself, and with all things, then went into his back-room, where stood the two chairs which his guests had sat upon, the table at which they had eaten of his bread, the cups and saucers which they had used, and the remains of the food of which they had but modestly partaken. As he looked round at these things he felt conscious of having been lifted into a higher, purer atmosphere than that in which he daily lived; of having come into contact with a superior order of being. Indeed, he thought 'twas even as if an angel shook his wings, as Dora stood speaking so naturally of God's love, and of the beautiful life to come. Her sweet unconscious influence had carried him for a moment where he could breathe mountain air, and catch a glimpse of snowy heights piercing heaven's blue; but now he was down in the mists of the valleys again, grovelling and groping as was his wont, not venturing, not even caring, to look up.

"Well," he said to himself, as he slowly cleared his little table, "I s'pose her life's as different to mine, and as far above it as the heaven's above the earth. Why, that's a Bible text 'as I've bin sayin', I'll bet a penny! Patty used to say, 'As far as the heaven's above the earth,' and summat else on to it, I can't jest 'mind what it were. But it's Bible, and I don't want to know it. How sorrowful the poor critter's eyes looked when I blurted out like that about the Bible to-night! Her eyes was awful like my Patty's when she looked that way. Froward, did she say I was? That's plain English; but so I am, I guess,—a froward old sinner is what I am, and ever shall be. The thoughts and feelings of thirty year ain't to be wiped away at fifty-eight, I'm thinkin'; and I'll jest make me content as I've bin all along."

Thus Matthew resolved, but it was not so easy to carry out the resolution; for, do what he would, reason and talk to himself as he would, he could not banish the feeling of discontent which had taken possession of him, and made him more restless and dissatisfied with himself than he had been for many a year.

Was it that 'divine discontent' which, when it happily disturbs the human soul, drives it hither and thither, from this broken cistern and that, until it find the fountain of living waters, which alone can satisfy with a perfect satisfaction, with an ineffable content? Time would have to show whether Matthew was thus blessedly affected.

As Dora walked homeward with her boy, she spoke once or twice of Matthew's kindness. "We don't even

know his name," she said, "but perhaps we can go and see him again, and then we'll take notice of it outside. I hope God will reward and bless him for his goodness to us."

When they reached their lodging, Dora spent her shilling in the shop before going upstairs, buying bread and butter for the morrow, and 'screws' of tea and sugar.

"I will leave them downstairs, if you please," she said to Mrs. Barish. "We shall need nothing to-night, as we met with a kind friend who gave us supper. It is very keen to-night," she added, with a shiver, as she drew her shawl more closely around her. "The frost is certainly increasing."

"It's healthy, seasonable weather," responded Mrs. Barish, weighing a scrap of butter with the nicest accuracy, nipping off a bit just as the scale showed a sign of descending. "We mustn't be such heathens as to fly in the face of the Almighty, and grumble at the weather. He's pleased to send. This is only the beginnin' of cold, too; we shall have real downright frost by-an'-by towards Christmas. How'll ye stand that, a poor sickly body like you, if you can't bear this bit o' cold?"

Dora did not reply, save with a peaceful smile which was peculiar to her, that seemed to tell of an inward joy with which no stranger might intermeddle—a joy that sustained her amid the cruel menaces of her outward circumstances.

"The boy looks as blue and pinched as if he'd got no blood in his body," continued Mrs. Barish. "If I was you I'd get him a little place indoors, somewhere where he'd be properly fed, and have a bit o' decent clothes to his back, as he haven't got a thing fit for winter now. And then you needn't be trapesing about seeking after food for him, as if he was a young bird as couldn't fly himself. Why, bless me! there's plenty of bits o' boys as small as him as has to get their livin', ay and a deal smaller, too. See the scraps as sells vesters and papers in the streets, and sweeps crossin's, and such like. Yes; take my word for it, that boy ought to be out, and leave you free. Why, you could take some sort of a situation yourself then, and you'd find yourself all the better for havin' reg'lar work, and reg'lar meat and drink. You can see as I'm a honest woman for trying to get rid of a lodger like that, and one that pays; but it's all for your good, as I gives ye a piece of kind advice." And Mrs. Barish drew up her thin person, and felt very magnanimous as she uttered these words.

In a few moments she added, as if wishful to indulge still further in the virtue of kindness, a thing which she so rarely did, "I suppose you're goin' off to bed, as you've got nothin' to stay up for; well then, take the boy and go and give yourselves a thorough warmin' at my fire afore you goes up."

Dora gladly accepted the invitation, for the night was so cold that the good effects of Matthew's fire upon their ill-clad bodies soon passed off on their way home through the frosty air. She led Hughie into the warm kitchen, and sat beside the fire watching his enjoyment of it the whole time. There was a hungry, yearning expression in her eyes, which you may have noticed in one on the borders of the grave who believed that he was looking upon you for the last time in this life.

Hughie looked up once and encountered this earnest gaze, and returned it, too. "Come and kiss me, love," she said. And he threw his arms around her and kissed her again and again, she holding him close, and dropping tears from her closed eyes over his wavy hair.

"Why are you crying, mother?" he asked, when she let him stand up again.

"I hardly know, my darling, but I think it's for you," she said with a smile.

"Then don't cry for me, mother," he said, trying to speak gaily. "When there's anything the matter with me I'll cry for myself. But now I don't want to cry, because I'm very warm and comfortable, and I've had a nice tea."

"Yes, yes," said his mother, still smiling through her tears. "The Lord has provided for us, my dear boy, and the Lord will provide; He will provide," she added, very earnestly, as if trying to extract every possible drop of comfort from the words.

She rose then, and saying they had better go to bed she returned to the

shop to wish Mrs. Barish good-night. Upon the strength of her graciousness in inviting them to the fire Dora asked timidly if she could oblige them with another blanket, as the night was so cold, and their bed was not well supplied. She did not venture to tell that it was the cold which had kept her awake nearly all the preceding night.

"Bless you, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Barish, in answer to her request. "There's plenty on your bed for the present; if you're with me when the weather gets colder, you shall have another blanket then. Stop till the real winter cold sets in."

"Never mind," said Dora, gently, as she turned away with a sudden flush on her cheek. "I'll wish you good night, Mrs. Barish."

"Good-night, good-night," responded she, briskly. And as they disappeared up the stairs, she added to herself, "Another blanket, indeed! What can three-shilling-a-week lodgers expect? Poor folks must learn to put up with discomforts,—ay, and to go cold, too; sometimes."

Dora had learned all this long ago; but the lesson had slowly killed her. When they got upstairs Hughie said his prayers at her knee as usual, and was soon tucked up in bed. "Aren't you coming, mother?" he said, anxiously. "It's warmer in bed than out of it this dreadful cold night. Do come."

"Yes, love; but I'll wait just a little first. You get off to sleep; I'm sure you're very tired. Good-night, darling boy, good-night. God ever bless you!" she said with extreme earnestness, as she stooped over and kissed him on brow and lips, and left him to dream his happy dreams.

(To be Continued.)

Old sayings in Rhyme.

As poor as a church mouse; as thin as a rail;
As fat as a porpoise; as rough as a gale;
As brave as a lion; as sly as a cat;
As bright as a sixpence; as weak as a rat.

As proud as a peacock; as sly as a fox;
As mad as a March hare; as strong as an ox;
As fair as a lily; as empty as air;
As flat as a crocus; as cross as a bear.

As pure as an angel; as neat as a pin;
As smart as a steel trap; as ugly as sin;
As dead as a door nail; as white as a sheet;
As flat as a pan-cake; as red as a beet.

As round as an apple; as black as your hat;
As mean as a miser; as blind as a bat;
As brown as a berry; as full as a tick;
As plump as a partridge; as sharp as a stick.

As clean as a penny; as dark as a pall;
As hard as a millstone; as bitter as gall;
As fine as a fiddler; as clear as a bell;
As dry as a herring; as deep as a well.

As light as a feather; as hard as a rock;
As stiff as a poker; as calm as a clock;
As green as a gosling; as brisk as a bee;
And now let me stop, lest you weary of me.

—Boston Gazette.

Overpowering Consideration.

While it is miserably selfish for dying wife or husband to extort from the surviving consort a promise never to marry again, it is not impossible to go to the other extreme, as the following instance shows:

A lady who died recently in England, after providing in her will that all her estate should go to her husband, and that her wardrobe should be sold to pay the expenses of her funeral, added: "It is also my earnest wish that my darling husband should marry ere long a nice, pretty girl, who is a good housewife, and above all to be careful that she is of good temper."

This is rather too much. It really looks as if the woman designed to heap "coals of fire" on the head of her afflicted. If, however, she was perfectly sincere, and her husband was a worthy man, her solicitude for his happiness may defeat its aim; for a man capable of appreciating such unselfish consideration ought to sicken at the very thought of taking another wife.

POET.

He sings because he needs must sing,
As birds do in the May,
Not caring who'll be listening,
Nor who may turn away.

Virtue is the only immortal thing which belongs to morality; it is an invincible greatness of mind, not to be elevated or dejected with good or ill fortune.