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The Sabbath-School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Second Quarter-Lesson III.—April 19.

THE LOST FOUND.—Luke 15:11 24.

Read Luke 15:1-32. Commit verses, 18-20.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of God over one sinner that repenteth.* —Luke 15:10.

THE FATHER AND HOME.—V. 11. A picture of what God meant the world to be. *A certain man had two sons.* The householder is our heavenly Father, full of love for his children. The two sons represent different characters and classes. God is the Father of all men; but there is a sense in which only those who believe in Jesus and obey God are his children.

WANDERING FROM FATHER AND HOME.—Vs. 12, 13. *Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.* The elder son, according to Jewish law, inherited a double portion. The younger would inherit at his father's death one third of his property. But he desired his father to anticipate the future and give him his share now. *And he divided unto them his living.* His property.

Spiritual Meaning of the Request. It is the expression of man's desire to be independent of God's control and restraints, and to do as he pleases. He thinks he can be happier thus. He is weary of restraints and laws. *Not many days after,* his thoughts soon took form *Took his journey into a far country.* Perhaps Rome, or Corinth, where were gathered every luxury and vice. The far country is being far from God in character, in motives, in feelings, in words, in sympathy.

THE WASTED LIFE.—*Wasted his substance with riotous living.* The down grades of life are generally steep and short His substance was wasted, for he got no corresponding good. He plunged into dissipation and every forbidden pleasure. He scattered his money. He wanted "to see life," and he saw the vilest part of life. He saw death rather than life.

Some have applied this riotous living chiefly to wanton and dissipated sinners. It does apply to them, but it applies also to all sinners. The worldly life is always a wasteful life. It wastes body and soul. It wastes life and health.

A FAMINE IN THAT LAND.—V. 14. *And when he had spent all,* which did not take long, *there arose a mighty famine in that land.* His pleasures failed, his money was gone, his seeming friends left him, his conscience tortured him, his heart was empty, he had none of the good things he had sought.

The soul has many hungers and thirsts. And the world with its riches and pleasures, can never satisfy the soul. We can quench our thirst with the salt waters of the sea more easily than we can satisfy the soul with worldly good. Solomon tried the world at its best, and with this result: "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." Multitudes of others have tried it with the same result.

Warnings. Beware of evil companions, who decoy away from the good and into the evil. Beware of evil habits. "Look not on the wine." "Flee youthful lusts." Be on your guard against the seductions of gambling.

IN THE DEPTHS.—V. 15. *And he went and joined himself.* In effect became a slave *to a citizen of that country,* representing either men hopelessly corrupt and worldly, or, perhaps, the powers of evil. The prodigal, with all his banquets and his lavishness, has not gained a single friend. The boasted freedom of sin soon becomes the most degrading slavery. Enticed by Satan's pleasures, he becomes Satan's drudge. *He sent him into the fields to feed swine,* the basest, most degrading work a Jew could do. No one knows what he will come to when he enters the paths of sin. *He would fain.* So hungry was he. *The husks that the swine did eat.* These husks are the pods and seeds of the locust or carob tree, long, curved pods, which are used for feeding horses, under the name of locust beans. They are capable of sustaining human life, like the acorns of the oak. In Germany and England the swine are driven into the woods to feed on the fallen acorns. 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 had deserted him in his need. They always do.

Practical Lessons. 1. The way of the transgressor is hard.

2. The course of sin is ever downward,—first pleasure, then loss, then want, then degradation, then fixed habits of sin, till the sinner becomes a citizen of that country, belonging there, as the drunkard, hating his chains and longing at times for better things, still clings to his cups.

3. Satan always fulfils his promises to the sinner in this terrible way.

COMING TO HIMSELF.—V. 17. *And when he came to himself,* as one awakening out of an evil dream, or one who has lost his reason, becomes himself again, and sees things as they are.

The famine, the hunger, the distress were God's messengers to the sinner, calling him home.

RETURNING HOME.—Repentance and Confession.—Vs. 18-20. The next step was to act upon his resolves. Good resolutions are the first step to a better life. The way to hell is not paved with good resolutions, but with broken resolutions. It is the way to heaven that is paved all the way with good resolutions. *I will arise and go.* I will put my resolves into action immediately. Doubtless there was a terrible battle of conflicting emotions; hope, need, desire, conscience, remembrance of his father and home, struggling against doubt whether he would be received, shame for his past, conscious unworthiness, fear of the taunts of his companions. Satan's chains are not easily broken. *And go to my father,* because he was his father, and the one against whom he had sinned. *I have sinned against heaven.* Against the authority and the principles of heaven. He showed his understanding of the true nature of sin by putting this first. So David says, 'Against thee, thee only have I sinned." *And before thee.* He had wronged his father, ill-treated his goodness. Many a fault stood out before him that he had forgotten or thought lightly of before. *I am no more worthy.* He makes no excuses. He humbly confesses his sins, and asks not rights, but mercies. This is a sign of true penitence. *And he arose and came to his father.* Toward, not to. This setting out on the homeward journey is the turning point in a prodigal's life. All that went before would be vain, and all that came after would be impossible without this.

THE WELCOME HOME.—Vs. 20 24. *And when he was yet a great way off,* coming slowly, wearily, in rags, shame-faced, and questioning about his welcome. So the sinner, conscious of his sin, knowing his unworthiness, yet hungering after God and home, returns to God ready to take the lowest place in his service. *His father saw him.* He was ever watching for the return. The Highland widow, whose daughter had gone away from home, and was morally lost, never bolted the door of her cottage, nor put out the light. I will not bolt it, she said, lest she should come when I am asleep, and I would not like her to find the door locked against her. *And ran,* to express the heartiness of his desire. *And kissed him.* He was welcomed to his father's heart as a son. *And the son said.* He began to confess his sins. *But the father said.* When the wanderer came back he found six things: he found a father, a home, a welcome, a ring, a feast and a song. *Bring forth the best robe.* The long, loose, and wide upper garment, often embroidered, which was worn by the Jews of rank, and in which the Pharisees loved to show themselves. This represents the robe of righteousness. *Put a ring on his hand.* The giving of the ring restores him not only to freedom, but to dignity and power. *Shoes on his feet.* Shoes were worn only by freemen, never by slaves. *Bring hither the fatted calf.* The one already fattened and kept for any call to entertain persons of distinction. *Let us....be merry.* So in each of the parables there was great rejoicing over the lost that was found. *For this my son was dead.* He had been dead to his home, and had been rescued as a brand from the burning. *And is alive again.* Has come back to his natural state of holiness and love for which God made us. *Was lost.* Another expression of the sinner's state. He is far from home, from his father, from true life, hungry, perishing, and does not know the way back alone. But God finds him and brings him back. There is no joy like that over a returning sinner. The angels in heaven sing their songs of welcome joy over a single sinner that repenteth, thus showing:

The employments and interests of heaven. The angels are ministering spirits, missionaries, doing all they can for the salvation of men.

The value of the soul. Cities and empires may rise and fall, but nothing is said of joy in heaven over it, but there is joy all through heaven over one soul saved.

W. C. T. Union.

OUR MOTTO.—*If God be for us who can be against us*

The Women of Shakespeare.

Shakespeare has no heroes; he has only heroines. There is not one entirely heroic figure in all his plays, except the short sketch of Henry the Fifth, exaggerated for the purposes of the stage; and the still slighter valentine in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona." In his labored and perfect plays you have no hero. Othello would have been one if his simplicity had not been so great as to leave him the prey of every base practice round him; but he is the only example even approximating to the heroic type. Coriolanus-Cæsar-Antony stand in flawed strength, and fell by their vanities; Hamlet, is indolent, and drowsily speculative; Romeo an impatient boy; the Merchant of Venice languidly submissive to adverse fortune; Kent, in King Lear, is entirely noble at heart, but too rough and unpolished to be of true use at the critical time, and he sinks into the office of a servant only. Orlando, no less noble, is yet the despairing toy of chance, followed comforted, saved, by Rosalind. Whereas there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope, and errorless purpose; Cordelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hermione, Imogen, Queen Katherine, Perdita, Sylvia, Viola, Rosalind, Helena, and last, and perhaps loveliest, Virgilia, are all faultless; conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity.

Then observe, secondly, the catastrophe of every play is caused always by the folly or fault of a man; the redemption, if there be any, is by the wisdom and virtue of a woman, and, failing that, there is none. The catastrophe of King Lear is owing to his own want of judgment, his impatient vanity, his misunderstanding of his children; the virtue of his one true daughter would have saved him from all the injuries of the others, unless he had cast her away from him; as it is, she all but saves him.

Of Othello I need not trace the tale—nor the one weakness of his so mighty love; not the inferiority of his perceptive intellect to that even of the second woman character in the play, the simlia, who dies in wild testimony against his error: "Oh, murderous coxcomb! What should such a fool do with so good a wife?"

In Romeo and Juliet, the wise and entirely brave stratagem of the wife is brought to ruinous issue by the reckless impatience of her husband. In Winter's Tale, and in Cymbeline, the happiness and existence of two princely households, lost through long years, and imperilled to the death by the folly and obstinacy of the husbands, are redeemed at last by the queenly patience and wisdom of the wives. In "Measure for Measure," the injustice of the judges, and the corrupt cowardice of the brother are opposed to the victorious truth and adamantine purity of a woman. In "Coriolanus," the mother's counsel, acted upon in time, would have saved her son from all evil; his momentary forgetfulness of it is his ruin; her prayer at last granted, saves him—not indeed, from death, but from the curse of living as the destroyer of his country.

And what shall I say of Julia, constant against the fickleness of a lover who is a mere wicked child?—of Helena against the petulance and insult of a careless youth?—of the patience of Hero, the passion of Beatrice, and the calmly devoted wisdom of the "unlessoned girl" who appears among the helplessness, the blindness and the vindictive passions of men, as a gentle angel, to save merely by her presence, and defeat the worst intensities of crime by her smile?

Observe, further, among all the principal figures in Shakespeare's plays, there is only one weak woman —Ophelia; and it is because she fails Hamlet at the critical moment, and is not, and cannot in her nature be, a guide to him when he needs her most, that all the bitter catastrophe follows. Finally, though there are three wicked women among the principal figures, Lady Macbeth, Regan and Goveril, they are felt at once to be frightful exceptions to the ordinary laws of life; fatal in their influence also in proportion to the power for good which they have abandoned.

Such, in broad light, is Shakespeare's testimony to the position and character of women in human life. He represents them as infallibly faithful and wise counsellors—incorruptibly just and pure examples—strong always to sanctify, even when they cannot save.—JOHN RUSKIN in *Sesame and Lilies.*

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