

The Sunday-School.

SECOND QUARTER,
LESSON VII.—May 15.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Luke 15: 11-24.

THE LESSON includes the parable of the Prodigal Son, together with a comparison of all three parables of Grace, which fill Luke 15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Come, and let us return unto the Lord.*—Hos. 6: 1.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—Time. January, A. D. 30. Not long after the last lesson. Place.—Somewhere in Perea, beyond Jordan.

Place in the Life of Christ.—The Persian ministry, two or three months before the crucifixion. The closing series of teachings.

THREE PARABLES OF GRACE.—The scribes and Pharisees criticized bitterly the conduct of Jesus in consorting with publicans and sinners. In response to these criticisms, Jesus spoke three parables: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son; each one presenting an aspect of the sinner and of his salvation.

First.—The sinner is represented (1) by a wandering sheep, thoughtlessly going astray; (2) by a piece of money, stamped with the divine image, but lost; (3) by a son, who wilfully forsakes his father's house.

Second.—A contrast of grace. (1) The shepherd goes after his sheep as Christ came to seek and save the lost. (2) The woman seeks everywhere for the lost coin, as the Holy Spirit seeks long after men, but (3) the father remains at home waiting to welcome the repentant one. All three express God's actions toward the sinner.

THE FAMILY AT HOME.—V. 11. *A certain man.* The head of a family, representing our heavenly Father. *Had two sons.* These represent different characters and classes of men.

THE WAYWARD SON.—V. 12. *And the younger of them.* A type of all sinners, but especially of all who have yielded to the temptations of youth. *Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me.* His portion at his father's death would be one-third, since the elder son received a double share. This request is man's desire to be independent of God's control and restraints. He thinks he can be happier thus. He is weary of seeing "thou shalt not" over the gates of so many a temple of pleasure and seeming paradise. *And he divided unto them his living.* There are those who can be saved only by permitting them to experience the bitterness of breaking God's commandments.

IN THE FAR COUNTRY.—V. 13. *Not many days after . . . took his journey.* He left father, home, innocence, love, duty. *Into a far country.* Perhaps Rome, or Corinth, or Antioch, where were every luxury and vice. The far country is being far from God. The prodigal expected a paradise of pleasure, a career of success. He wasted his substance with riotous living. He plunged into dissipation and drunkenness. He wanted "to see life," and he saw the worst and vilest part of life. But this

applies also to all sinners; for they do with spiritual things what riotous men do with earthly things. The worldly life is always a wasteful life.

THE FAMINE IN THAT LAND.—Vs. 14-16. *And when he had spent all.* His riches flew away. *There arose a mighty famine in that land.* His pleasures failed, his money gone, his friends left him, his conscience tortured him, he had none of the good things he had sought. *And he began to be in want.* Riches and pleasures can never satisfy the soul. *And he went and joined himself.* He was, in effect, a slave to a citizen of that country. *He sent him . . . to feed swine.* The most degrading work a Jew could do. *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, which are used for feeding cattle. *No man gave unto him better food, or any at all.* He had to pick up what he could.

Note. 1. The friends he had made by sin had deserted him, in his need.

2. "The way of the transgressor is hard."

3. The course of sin is ever downward—first pleasure, then loss, then want, then degradation, then fixed habits of sin.

THE PRODIGAL COMES TO HIMSELF.—Vs. 17-19. *And when he came to himself.* A striking expression. It is as one awakening out of an evil dream. The famine, the hunger, the distress were God's messengers to the sinner, calling him home. *How many hired servants, etc.* The lowest in his father's house have plenty. The poorest in righteousness are better off than the highest in sin. *I will arise.* He resolves to change his course of life. We never do better till we make up our minds to do it. *And go.* The action follows the heart's purpose. *I have sinned against heaven* (against its authority and laws) *and before thee, whom he had disgraced and wronged.* *And am no more worthy.* He makes no excuses. This is a sign of true repentance. *Make me as one of thy hired servants.* Let me take any place, however lowly.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.—V. 20. Note the steps of return: (1) A consciousness of want; (2) a conviction of sin; (3) a hope of better things; (4) a resolve to go to his father. (5) confession of sin; (6) repentance put into action. *And he arose, and came to his father.* This setting out on the homeward journey is the turning point in a prodigal's life.

THE FATHER'S WELCOME HOME.—Vs. 20-24. *When he was yet a great way off.* Coming wearily, in rags, shamefaced. So the sinner returns to God. *His father saw him.* He was ever watching for the return. *And ran.* Expressing the intensity of his desire. *And kissed him.* The Greek implies frequent, repeated kisses. *And the son said.* The confession he had planned. *Bring forth the best robe.* 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.* The feast indicates the joy of the father in receiving home his penitent son. So there is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth. *For this my son was dead, to his home, his father.* The sinner becomes dead to the great realities of life. He lives as if these things did not exist. *Was lost.* Another expression of the sinner's state. Remember the infinite forgiving love of our heavenly Father, his longing to forgive and restore us, and all that he has done to bring us back to himself, to right living, to his heavenly home.

CROWDING OUT THE BIBLE.

A writer in the *Presbyterian* says these very timely things about the Bible in the Sunday school:

"The introduction of the uniform lesson system in 1883, which enables somewhat over 25,000,000 of people in the Sabbath schools of the world to study the same lesson every Sunday, and our denominational publishers to furnish a series of exceedingly valuable lesson helps, has nevertheless given rise to an abuse, and in numerous instances has driven the Bible from the school. That this was never intended requires no argument, and yet the fact remains that the Lesson Help has been substituted for the Bible. The office of the Sunday school is primarily to study the Scriptures, and not only each teacher, but every scholar capable of reading, shall have their Bible in their hand and read from the book during the school hour. The Lesson Help has its place, but we believe that place to be in the home in preparation for the class, and one of the difficulties which should be met by the Sunday school of today is the furnishing of Bibles where necessary, so that there could be no excuse for substituting anything else. Sometime ago, on visiting a school, two classes were joined on account of absent teachers, and given to me, making nine scholars in all, and all they had to study the lesson with was two Testaments and two papers, which contained the lesson, nor was there a spare Bible in the school. Now, this is neither a solitary or rare occurrence in these days for in at least two schools of different denominations which I personally visited, there was not a Bible in use; and the time is surely opportune to rally our Sunday school forces back to the living Word. One of the most interesting themes at the last International Sunday School Convention in Denver was the "Bible Our Text-Book," and all the advanced thinkers and writers of the day unite in demanding that the Bible shall be restored to its rightful place. Mr. Axtell, in his book, the "Organized Sunday School," says "Of whatever else a Sunday school may be short, a shortage should never appear in its stock of Bibles. The textbook of the Sunday school is the Word, and how are our young people to become familiar with the Word if never led farther into it than to see the few verses doled out to them in the Lesson Leaf; the Bible should have the place of honor in every Sunday school service. Every eye should turn to it, every exercise should lead to it, and every song should paraphrase some of its sweet truths."

He who "gets religion" without getting right with his neighbor, has not got anything that is worth much.

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Heaven has no cash value. It is not the golden streets nor the pearly gates, nor the jeweled walk, that make heaven's worth. These would be tinsel without Christ.

"Man is Filled with Misery."—This is not true of all men. The well, sound of lung, clear of eye, alert and buoyant with health, are not miserable whatever may be their social condition. To be well is to be happy, and we can all be well by getting and keeping our bodies in a healthful state. Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil will help all to do this.

What is the use of "turning over a new leaf" if it only repeats the old story!

Death Comes to All.—But it need not come prematurely if proper precautions are taken. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and to have prevention at hand and allow a disease to work its will is wickedness. Dr. Thomas' Electric Oil not only allays pains when applied internally, but will prevent lung troubles resulting from colds and coughs. Try it and be convinced.

A half-truth: The half that is lie always does more harm than the half that is truth can do good.

There is no such a thing as a harmless cough. The trouble goes from bad to worse unless checked. Allen's Lung Balsam cures the worst of colds. It allays inflammation and clears the air passages.

He who runs away from sin is a Christian, he who runs after it is a sinner.

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