

Sunday is distinguished from all other days. We love the courage with which they hold on by their convictions of duty and of right, and feel reproached by the contrast which their system of family and household devotion presents to the irregular and perfunctory engagements of many of our English homes. Say what you will of a Scotchman, he is not ashamed of his religion, nor is he morbidly shy of its obtrusion, lest it should offend some squeamish visitor. But surely there is a medium. Why may we not be ourselves on Sunday as well as on other days?

GOLDEN TRUTHS.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF 1877.

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MARCH 4. Morning. CARE AND TRUST. (Matt. vi. 19-34.) Peculiar treasures consist chiefly of garments, or precious robes, and these the moth destroys; food and corn, and these the worm consumes or corrupts; and gold and silver and these are often stolen. Genuine treasures, then, must be laid up in heaven, where all are safe. We lay up treasures in heaven by giving to the poor and by fellowship with God (Luke xvi. 9). Our treasure is that which we love best; hence, wherever it is, our heart is. The light of the body, that is, the organ through which we receive light, is the eye; if it is single, that is, in a healthy state, it will see well; if it is double, that is, diseased, its sight will be impaired. So, too, with the eye of the mind. Singleness of eye means purity of motive. It knows only one object of love—namely, God. A man may have so little light in him that it may amount to nothing, and then how great is his darkness!—for he deceives himself. Mammon (verse 24) means money, which is here viewed as a god in opposition to the true God. These two masters no man can serve, for they are in direct opposition one to another. But when we give way to anxious care we do serve Mammon, for we distrust God, and place dependence on worldly possessions. Against this Christ warns us here. We are to take no anxious thought about anything whatever. 1. Not about our food, for God provides for the fowls of heaven, and much more for us. 2. Not about our station, or the duration of our life, as some understand it; for it is determined by God's will. 3. Not about our raiment, for as God clothes the grass of the field, or the stalks of the lily with its beautiful flower—the splendid white or scarlet lily, whose stem is three feet high—much more will he clothe us. The stalks of the lily were used in Palestine for heating ovens. The Gentiles, or the heathen, seek after these things; but we are to seek first, in point of time, in point of importance, and in point of earnestness, the kingdom of God and the righteousness which prepares for it and forms part of it, trusting Him to give us all things else. And all needful things He will give. The texture of the lily was far more beautiful than the robes of Solomon. Learn Phil. iv. 6. A precious text.

Afternoon. THE STORY OF NABOTH. (1 Kings xxi. 1-10.) Ahab wanted to obtain Naboth's vineyard, but Naboth refused, because the sale of his paternal inheritance was forbidden (Lev. xxv. 23-28; Num. xxxvi. 7.) Ahab went home in all ill-humour, and told his wife Jezebel. What said she? Was he not king in Israel, and would he not take the vineyard by force? She would give it him. And the wicked woman charged Naboth with blasphemy, and, to give a legal appearance to her conduct, brought him before a court of justice, where two men gave witness against him. He was then stoned to death, and she then told Ahab to go and take possession of the vineyard. Naboth's sons were also put to death (2 Kings ix. 26). She thought the property confiscated to the crown (Deut. xiii. 16). Ahab went; but there Elijah met him, and uttered the terrible words of verse 19. The threat was not fulfilled in him (verses 27-29), but in his son Joram it was literally fulfilled (2 Kings ix. 25, 26). Learn verse 20. The wicked, when in trouble, are always afraid to meet the righteous.

Mar. 11. Morning. THE FIRST MISSIONARIES. (Matt. x. 1-15.) They were the twelve apostles—the word apostle signifying one who is sent. These were sent forth. (1) *Whither?* Not to the Gentiles; not to the Samaritans; but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Christ's immediate mission was to the latter only; but the time would come when the former also would hear the truth. (Matt. viii. 11, 12; xxviii. 19. John iv. 35, 36.) (2) *With*

what mission? A mission to preach the Gospel and to heal the sick, etc. The first instance of the dead being raised by an apostle is mentioned in Acts ix. 36. (3) *In what spirit?* Freely. They had received freely, and they were to give freely. Nor were they to provide for their temporal wants, for God would take care of them. The word *scrip* means a bag; the word *purses* means girdles, in which people carried their money; and the word *staves* means travelling staffs. Those who were prepared to receive the Gospel would provide for them; not so its enemies (Luke xxii. 35). (4) *How* were they to treat the families they met with? To salute the house with a blessing (ver. 12); to inquire for its worthy members; to abide in it if it was worthy, and to leave it if otherwise. In the latter case they were to shake off the dust of their feet against it, as an announcement of coming judgment. Mark vi. 12 informs us what they did.

Afternoon. ELIJAH TRANSLATED. 2 Kings ii. 1, 2. Elijah was about to be taken up in a tempest, or whirlwind, to heaven. Elisha went with him from Gilgal (Jiljil.), on the mountains (Joshua viii. 35) to Bethel (Buhir), 1 King x. 29) which were seats of the schools of the prophets. Elijah did not know that Elisha was aware of what was to take place, and from a feeling of humility wished him to go no further; but Elisha was resolved to proceed (ver. 3). In Bethel the sons of the prophets asked him if he knew that Jehovah would take away his master that day. He answered "Yes, but be silent," as he knew what Elijah felt. From Bethel they went to Jericho, which was not far from the Jordan. Here the request of Elijah was repeated, but with the same result (ver. 8). They reached the Jordan, and here Elijah rolled up his prophet's cloak, and smote the waters with it so that they divided, and the two went over (Exodus xiv. 16). Here Elijah allowed his servant to make one more request (ver. 9, 10), and he asked for "a double portion of his spirit," a request based on Deut. xxi. 17, and meaning the double portion which the firstborn received of his father's inheritance. It was a hard thing, for God only would grant it; but it would be given if he saw him ascend (ver. 2). Suddenly a fiery chariot and horses separated the two, and Elijah was carried up in the tempest to heaven (comp. Gen. v. 24, Deut. xxxii. 49, 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.) Elijah was "changed" but did not die. "As he was an unparalleled champion for the honour of the Lord, a fiery war-chariot was the symbol of his triumphal procession into heaven." two heavenly visitants of Christ on the Mount (Matt. xvii. 3, 4).

Mar. 13. Morning. CHRIST'S FORERUNNER. Matt. x. 1-15. John the Baptist had been cast into prison, a dark fortress called Machærus, on the east of the Dead Sea (Matt. xiv. 3). Perhaps depressed in mind, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus with this question (verse 3), and Jesus sent them back with this answer (verse 4-6). These were evidences of His Messiahship, and when John heard of them his doubts and fears would be removed. Jesus then uttered His testimony respecting John to the multitudes around Him (verse 7, 9). In large numbers they had gone into the wilderness to see John (Matt. iii. 5). What did they see? Not a sickle man, or one who was like a reed shaken with the wind, such as grew on the banks of the Jordan, for John was no waverer in his faith; not a man clothed in soft raiment, effeminate and luxurious, for John was no coward, like his enemies in the court of Herod, who did wear soft clothing. They went out to see a prophet, and John was more than a prophet. What was he? The precursor of the Messiah, the herald of the Son of man (compare John i. 6-8). Of him the prophet Malachi had written (iii. 1) as the messenger who was to prepare the way before the Lord (Isa. xl. 3-5). Hence John was the greatest ever born of woman (Job xiv. 1). No greater prophet had hitherto arisen than he. Yet he that is less (not least as in our version) in the kingdom of heaven, or occupies in it a lower place, is greater than he, for he has greater peace, clearer light, and richer hopes (verse 11). The meaning of verse 12 is doubtful, but the best interpreters explain it thus: The kingdom of heaven is like a closed fortress, and from the days of John until now, violent persons eager to enter it, press in, and take it, as by storm. "It does and suffers violence, both in its twofold influence; it exerts a mighty power itself, and a mighty power must be put forth towards it, whether it be of faith or unbelief, for its testimony produces an instant separation between the two." That is, some take it by violent prayer and faith, and thus enter into it and realize its blessings; others try to take it by violent opposition, and they are crushed in the attempt. On verses 13-15 see Matt. iv. 5, and Matt. xvii. 12. John was Elijah,