

The Sunday School.

A LIST OF THE LESSONS FOR 1879.

STUDIES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

- Jan. 5.—The Second Temple. Ezra iii. 1-13.
- 12.—The Dedication. Ezra vi. 14-22.
- 19.—The Mission of Nehemiah. Neh. ii. 1-8.
- 26.—The Builders Interrupted. Neh. iv. 7-18.
- Feb. 2.—The Reading of the Law. Neh. viii. 1-8.
- 9.—Keeping the Sabbath. Neh. xiii. 15-22.
- 16.—The Way of the Righteous. Psalm i. 1-6.
- 23.—The King of Zion. Psalm ii. 1-12.
- Mar. 2.—Prayer of the Penitent. Psalm li. 1-13.
- 9.—The Joy of Forgiveness. Psalm xxxiii. 1-11.
- 16.—Delight in God's House. Psalm lxxiv. 1-12.
- 23.—The All-seeing God. Psalm cxxxix. 1-12.
- 30.—Review.
- Apr. 6.—Jancified Affliction. Job xxxiii. 14-30.
- 13.—Prosperity Restored. Job xlii. 1-10.
- 20.—Queen Esther. Esther iv. 10-17.
- 27.—The Coming Saviour. Isaiah xlii. 1-10.
- May 4.—The Suffering Saviour. Isaiah liii. 1-12.
- 11.—The Saviour's Call. Isaiah iv. 1-11.
- 18.—The Saviour's Kingdom. Micah iv. 1-8.
- 25.—The Holy Spirit Promised. Joel ii. 28-32.
- June 1.—Prophecy against Tyre. Ezek. xxvi. 7-14.
- 8.—The Valley of Dry Bones. Ezek. xxxvii. 1-10.
- 15.—The Need of God's Spirit. Zech. 1-14.
- 22.—Consecration to God. Malachi iii. 8-19.
- 29.—Review.

STUDIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

- July 6.—Peace with God. Romans v. 1-10.
- 13.—The Security of Believers. Rom. viii. 28-39.
- 20.—Christian Love. 1 Cor. xiii. 1-13.
- 27.—Victory over death. 1 Cor. xv. 50-58.
- Aug. 3.—Ministry of Reconciliation. 2 Cor. v. 14-21.
- 10.—The Fruit of the Spirit. Gal. v. 22-26; vi. 1-9.
- 17.—The Christian Armour. Eph. vi. 10-20.
- 24.—The Mind of Christ. Phil. ii. 1-13.
- 31.—Practical Religion. Col. iii. 16-25.
- Sept. 7.—The Coming of the Lord. 1 Thes. iv. 13-18.
- 14.—The Christian in the World. 1 Tim. vi. 6-16.
- 21.—The Christian Citizen. Titus iii. 1-9.
- 28.—Review.
- Oct. 5.—Our Great High-Priest. Heb. iv. 14-16; v. 1-6.
- 12.—The Types Explained. Heb. ix. 1-12.
- 19.—The Triumphs of Faith. Heb. xi. 1-10.
- 26.—Faith and Works. James ii. 14-26.
- Nov. 2.—The Perfect Pattern. 1 Peter ii. 19-25.
- 9.—The Perfect Saviour. 1 John i. 1-10.
- 16.—The Love of the Father. 1 John iv. 7-16.
- 23.—The Glorified Saviour. Rev. i. 10-20.
- 30.—Message to the Churches. Rev. iii. 1-13.
- Dec. 7.—The Heavenly Song. Rev. v. 1-14.
- 14.—The Heavenly City. Rev. xxi. 21-29; xxii. 1-5.
- 21.—The Last Words. Rev. xxii. 10-21.
- 28.—Review.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON VI.

Feb. 9. THE KEEPING OF THE SABBATH. { Neh. xiii. 1879. 15-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy."—Ex. xx. 8.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Neh. ix. 1-20. . . . Sins confessed.
- T. Neh. ix. 21-38. . . . Mercies Acknowledged.
- W. Neh. x. 1-39. . . . The covenant sealed.
- Th. Neh. xii. 27-47. . . . The walls dedicated.
- F. Neh. xiii. 1-14. . . . The chambers cleansed.
- S. Neh. xiii. 15-22. . . . The Sabbath Observed.
- S. Jer. xvii. 19-27. . . . Sabbath desecration denounced.

HELPS TO STUDY.

After the great gathering brought together for the reading of the law, the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated as of old. Then soon after a day of fasting and humiliation for sin was observed, when the people renewed their solemn covenant with Jehovah. Nehemiah continued his patriotic labours. Two matters are noted. (1.) *The filling up of Jerusalem.* There were large spaces within the walls uninhabited. The people who lived in the outlying towns and villages, by Nehemiah's direction cast lots, one in every ten being chosen to go to live in the capital. There were also some who volunteered to go. (2.) *The Dedication of the Wall,* which was made with great sacrifices and rejoicings, two companies of singers, one under Nehemiah, and another under Ezra, making a circuit of the wall in opposite directions, until they halted before the temple.

After twelve years of labour for the good of his countrymen, Nehemiah returned to the Court of Artaxerxes. After an absence, whose duration is unknown, he came back again, but found to his sorrow that many abuses had crept in, and grievous wrong was being done. A second time he entered upon his work of reform. He cleansed the desecrated chambers of the temple, and brought back the Levites and singers who, unpaid and neglected, had abandoned their duties and returned home. The next reform is that related in our lesson. He found—

I. THE SABBATH PROFANED—Vers. 15-18.

Notice.—I. *The Desecration.* Every kind of work and

business was being carried on. Husbandmen pursued their labours; the wine presses were trod; the sheaves were brought in from the fields to be thrashed; the fruits were gathered. (Note 1.) There were those who bought and sold. The weary beasts were compelled to bear their burdens. Those who had no regard for God's law would have little pity for His dumb creatures. Doubtless, these Sabbath breakers would have many excuses. They would plead the disturbed condition of the country, which made it unsafe to neglect the harvest, and the time they had given to rebuilding the temple and the walls of Jerusalem. Blinded by their own selfish interests, very quickly had they forgotten God's commands and their own solemn promises. No worldly interests should ever interfere with the sacredness of the day God has set apart for man's own good.

The evil example of the surrounding godless nations, and especially of the men of Tyre, with whom they had intimate trade relations, doubtless, did much to corrupt the Jews. Phœnician influence had in former times wrought much mischief. It was the Sidonian Jezebel who led on the weak and wicked Ahab to sell himself to work evil.—1 Kings xvi. 31. And now this colony of Tyrians infected all Jerusalem with its irreligion and godlessness. Such is the danger of worldly associates. "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

2. *The Remonstrance.* Nehemiah's faithful supervision of affairs led him at once to detect the evil, and bold, faithful, uncompromising, he cannot pass it by unnoticed, or content himself with a vague disclaimer. He testified against the wrong-doers. He remonstrates, rebukes, bears witness against the sin and the shame. So the Christian is called upon to be faithful in rebuking evil. But let us take heed that while the truth is spoken, it is spoken in love. Let us show our opposition to sin first and most in ourselves, then we can consistently rebuke the sins of others. Let us not mistake anger on account of personal wrong for righteous indignation. Remember, too, that genuine hatred of sin is always accompanied by love and pity for the sinner.

Nehemiah gave another proof of his sincerity and courage. He contended with the nobles. He did not fear to deal with sin in high places. With just impartiality he would not permit rank to shelter or sanction guilt. The nobles themselves had not bought or sold, or laboured; perhaps they had not been in any way connected with the profanation of the Sabbath. But at least they had held their peace, had failed to use their influence in restraining the wrong-doers. They, therefore, were responsible, and were involved in the national guilt.

Every man in a community or in a church is responsible for all evil of whose existence he is aware, and which he does not expose and oppose, and the higher the social position, the greater the responsibility. The man who refrains from rebuke of evil on account of the trouble and annoyance he may suffer, is accessory to the wrong, whatever it be.

Nehemiah reminds the people of the sin of old, and the punishment. Neglect of the Sabbath had been one of the crimes which had provoked their doom. Sabbath-breaking is still a sin against God, who has set apart the day; against society which would become utterly demoralized without its influence; against the body, which requires rest; against the soul, which requires this blessed opportunity for communion with God and spiritual improvement. The Sabbath-breaker will not escape with impunity. National sins will be followed by national punishments. The land which disregards God and violates His laws, is sure to suffer sooner or later. The history of Israel and Judah is a mirror for all.

II. THE SABBATH SANCTIFIED—verses 19-22.

Nehemiah did not merely use remonstrance and moral suasion. He took strongest measures to put an end to the profanation. The gates were shut at dark, as soon as the Sabbath began, a watch was set. Once or twice an effort was made to resist Nehemiah's measures. The merchants took their places without the walls that they might hold their market, and yet evade the law. But Nehemiah is firm. He threatened them, and the transgressors, towards at heart, soon desisted. If the administrators of law do their duty, the bluster of the wrong-doers will quickly be silenced. Nehemiah made the carrying out of his measures a sacred duty. He detailed for this service Levites, to whom the ministry in holy things belonged. They, too, must first cleanse themselves. Here is a lesson for all who seek to put down evil—they must be consecrated by separation from all sin, and must go with clean hearts and clean hands to the work of reformation.

A question comes up here which must be faced. Did Nehemiah succeed? He enforced outward observance of the Sabbath, but he could not make the people religious. The latter he could not do, nor can any legislation do so. But for all that the legislation is right and necessary. Its purpose is to restrain wrong-doers, and to protect those whom they oppress or mislead. Nehemiah could not make the farmers and traders religious; but he could secure for their servants and for their beasts the rest which God mercifully enjoined. He could prevent public desecration of the holy day; he could shield from temptation the young and the ignorant; he could secure opportunity for rest and devotion for all who would avail themselves of it. These are the objects of all restrictive legislation, whether in regard to the liquor traffic or gambling, or Sabbath-breaking, or any immorality. The law is made for the lawless who are to be restrained; and for the oppressed who are to be protected. It is a shelter, a bulwark, under whose protection true religion may grow and extend.

Then in regard to our observance of the Sabbath, let us look upon it as a privilege. It was made for man, for man's

real benefit and advancement. True Sabbath-keeping does not consist merely in giving up so much or so little of week-day employments; but in using the whole day for God's glory and the good of our own soul and the souls of others. It is the Lord's Day. It belongs to Christ. Whatever brings us nearer to Him or helps us to bring others nearer to Him is in its place on His day. Whatever separates from Him, or has its motive and purpose in serving self and the world, is contrary to the spirit and intention of the sacred day. If the heart is given to God, then, and then only, will the Sabbath be kept for Him, and be "a delight, the holy of the Lord, honourable."

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. *Bringing in sheaves.* Is it not singular that the people should carry their grain into the city to thresh it? It would be strange with us, because our citizens are not husbandmen. In the East, however, the farmers all live in villages and towns, and go forth to cultivate the surrounding country. It is not unusual, therefore, for them to bring their harvest home to thresh it. The farmers brought their grain within the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah, to secure it against robbers. For the country was then in an unsettled and unsafe condition.—*Land and Book.*

2. *What Sabbath-observing nation has ever been barbarous and ignorant?* The lands of the Sabbath and of the Bible have always been the chosen abodes of knowledge, and the lights of the earth. Let England and France, Scotland and Spain, the United States and Mexico, Ulster and Connaught, show how much intellectual character is affected by the presence or absence of a holy Sabbath. No country has continued so long to maintain its superiority in respect of the attainments of its learned men, and the general intelligence of its people, as Britain; and in no country has more regard been evinced to the Lord's day. Next in order comes America, advancing with rapid strides in the "march of intellect," as well as of religion. These two countries take the lead of all others as propagators of knowledge and civilization throughout the world.—*Giffilan.*

**BOY SMOKERS.**—What the effect of tobacco is upon the human system is a question still in dispute among scientists and experts. But there can be no doubt as to its deleterious influence upon the young. The facts in this case are forcibly presented in a recent number of the *British Medical Journal*, which, referring especially to the habit of smoking upon the health of boys under sixteen years of age, says: "A celebrated physician took for this purpose thirty-eight boys, aged from nine to fifteen, and carefully examined them. In twenty-seven of them he discovered injurious traces of the habit. In twenty-two there were various disorders of the circulation and of digestion, palpitation of the heart, and a more or less marked taste for strong drink. In twelve there was frequent bleeding of the nose, ten had disturbed sleep, and twelve had slight ulcerations of the mucous membrane of the mouth, which disappeared on ceasing from the use of tobacco for some days. The doctor treated them all for weakness; but with little effect until the smoking was discontinued, when health and strength were restored."

*Scribner's Monthly.*

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The February number of "Scribner" has for frontispiece a portrait of Mr. R. W. Emerson. Accompanying the portrait is a paper on the "Homes and Haunts of Emerson," by F. B. Sanborn of Concord, embodying considerable material never before published. Among the illustrations are views of Concord, Walden Pond, the Old Manse, and Emerson's present home, all by Homer Martin (who here appears for the first time as an illustrator); and the poet's library and interiors of the Old Manse, by Lathrop and Riordan. A half-humorous, half-serious paper on "Aerial Navigation," by the poet Stedman, contains a review of the history of the subject and many practical suggestions toward the working out of the problem, the writer venturing the sanguine prophecy that the world is on the eve of its successful solution. Mr. Stedman reproduces in elucidation of his theories a number of his own designs for motors, made many years ago. Other papers are: "A Symposium on the Chinese Question," by A. A. Hayes, jr., who has collated the opinions of "distinguished representative men," including Ah Lee, Hon. Phelim McFinnegan, Mons. Alphonse de la Fontaine, Herr Isaac Rosenthal, and others; a second paper of new anecdotes of parsons, by Rev. Edward Eggleston, entitled "To the Clergy;" and an essay on "The Relations of Insanity to Modern Civilization," by H. P. Stearns, of the Hartford Retreat for the Insane. In "Topics of the Time," Dr. Holland discusses "Checks and Balances," and "Royalty and Loyalty in Canada." In "Home and Society," Mrs. Oakey's "Hints to Young Housekeepers" are continued, the special topics being the duties of laundress, waitress and lady's maid. The "Bric-a-Brac" department contains an account of the singular will of Kosciuszko, filed in Albemarle Co., Va., but never executed.