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Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

Second Quarter.

Lesson IV. April 27. Luke 8: 4-15.

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

GOLDEN TEXT. "Take heed, therefore, how ye hear."

—Luke 8: 18.

EXPLANATORY.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE PARABLE WAS SPOKEN. Ver. 4. And when much people were gathered together, Jesus had gone out of the city of Capernaum, probably toward the plain of Genesareth, on the south, and was walking on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

The Moral Situation. Much more important than the physical surroundings was the moral situation of the hour. Jesus saw in that multitude every kind of hearer which he described in the parable. We were come to Him out of every city.

The interest in Jesus and His teaching, and the hope of the inauguration of the new kingdom by wondrous works, attracted great crowds from all directions. He speaks by a parable. This was the beginning of this new method of teaching.

I. THE SOWER. 5. A sower went out to sow. Whosoever sows the Word of God in the hearts of the people, is represented by the sower in the parable. Hence the sower designates (1) Jesus Christ, who came forth from the Father and from heaven to sow the good seed in this evil world. (2) The apostles who, taught by Jesus, and under the influence of the Spirit, scattered over the then known world the truth of the kingdom of God. (3) All who go forth to preach or to teach, in public or in private, the truths of the Word of God.

II. THE SEED. To sow his seed. That is, the Word of God (Luke 8: 11), the spiritual truths which God has revealed to men in various ways, but especially by His Son Jesus Christ. All spiritual life depends on a divine seed sown in the heart by the Divine Sower.

III. THE SOIL. The soil for the good seed is the heart of man, including his memory, mind, and will. The seed cannot grow without soil; but the life is in the seed, not in the soil. The results depend largely on the kind of soil in which the seed is sown, and the preparation made for receiving the seed.

IV. THE CARE. For a good harvest it is absolutely necessary to have three things,—the best seed, the best soil, and the best care. If any one of these fail, the harvest is lessened.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 5. And as he sowed some fell by the way side. The grain-fields are rarely fenced, though the landmarks are definite and plain. And it was trodden down. By the passers-by, so that it would not be brushed or blown aside into good soil.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 6. And as he sowed some fell by the way side. The grain-fields are rarely fenced, though the landmarks are definite and plain. And it was trodden down. By the passers-by, so that it would not be brushed or blown aside into good soil.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 7. And some fell among thorns, etc. Where the soil was good, but was preoccupied by roots and seeds, if not by thorn-plants.

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THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 11. And some fell among thorns, etc. Where the soil was good, but was preoccupied by roots and seeds, if not by thorn-plants.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 12. Those by the way side are they that hear, but do not understand it, and the word is snatched away from their hearts, and they do not bear fruit.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 13. Are they which, when they hear, receive the word with joy. Their emotions are touched, but the word does not reach their moral nature, and their will and character are unchanged.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 14. Are choked with care. . . of this life. Anxieties about worldly success; too much relaxing attention to the labors of daily life; the desire for worldly goods and honors; the being absorbed in things which are right in themselves and in their degree, but should be subordinated to higher purposes.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 15. Are fruitful. The deceitfulness of riches (Mark);—riches which deceive by giving the impression that they are able to bestow what they cannot give. And pleasures of this life. "The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." Even pleasures which are right in themselves may become too absorbing, may occupy too much attention, and thus choke the word. The wheat

and the thorns are having a great struggle in our lives. And bring no fruit to perfection. The best fruit of the fruit of the Spirit; and those who do bear are weak, imperfect, and small. The soil was good, the seed was good; but the thorns rendered these ineffectual.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS.—8. And other fell on good ground. There is much more good ground in the field than of thorny, rocky, or wayside places, but the good soil greatly varies in quality. And bare fruit a hundredfold. This represents the highest degree of fruitfulness. (Other seeds only bore sixty or thirtyfold (Mark), but all bore good fruit.)

THE INTERPRETATION. 15. Are they which in an honest and good heart. One that seeks the truth and welcomes it, that puts away prejudice and selfishness, and desires to know and obey the word of God. Hearing heard the word, keep it; i. e., hold it fast, not allowing it to be snatched away by the devil, nor dried up with the first heat of temptation, nor choked by more cherished purposes and habits of life.

THE FRUITFUL HEARERS. 16. And bring forth fruit. The fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22), the fruits required by the Sermon on the Mount, and by the description of the judgment in Matt. 25, the fruits which belong to the kingdom of heaven, and will make this world like heaven.

With patience. Persevering, earnest care in cultivating that which would destroy the good seed, and in outlasting and cherishing the growing harvest. There can be no harvest without these things.

NOTE 1. That the harvest is of the same kind as the seed.

NOTE 2. That the harvest, both of good and of evil, is vastly larger than the amount of seed sown.

NOTE 3. That some harvests are soon matured; others are a long time in growing and ripening.

A Hard Lesson. No prettier bride ever went to Europe on a wedding trip than Katie Fenton, and no madder bridegroom could have been found than John Fenton. They had a charming passage, and started from Liverpool for a year's stay on the Continent.

"What kind of wine, sir?" asked the waiter at the first table d'hote dinner in Paris.

"None," said John; but Katie exclaimed, "Oh, everybody tells me we must not drink wine in those foreign cities, unless we want to have cholera and typhoid fever."

"Well," said John, and taking up the rejected wine-card he ordered a bottle. For six weeks after John ordered wine every noon and night. At first they both agreed that the "vin ordinaire" was poor stuff, tasting like ink and vinegar.

By and-by John said it looked as if they were "too poor" to have anything but the cheap stuff; so he called for more expensive wine, which was far stronger, but he drank the same amount. Naturally they made acquaintances, and John was invited to champagne suppers.

After a while he began to need a little brandy to brace himself up with after each supper. He was a very untidy, tentative travelling companion, and the very day passed like a dream to the young pair, seeing new cities, pictures, castles, cathedrals, and novel excitement everywhere.

On the steamer coming home Katie wondered if all the passagers needed so much stimulant as John required. When he reached his native place and began his business, the truth came out. John had become intemperate. He kept up almost a year, and just before the second anniversary of his marriage day was sent South on important business. He had a dissipated friend in New Orleans. They went to the theatre together, then to a gambling place. John lost thousands of dollars belonging to the man who had trusted him. When at last he returned home, he had fully realized what he had done, he wrote a farewell letter to his wife, bade her kiss his little child for him, and forgive one who was not "worthy to live."

From that day for long years Katie mourned for the fellow who had died by his own hand; for the letter told her he meant to drown himself. How many, many times she recalled their courtship, their year of travel together. One day an old aunt of John's said to her, "It must be a comfort to you that John did not drown you about his habits before marriage. You know (and we all know) he was a strictly temperate man until that last year or two."

Like a blow half stunning her, there came to Katie the consciousness that not until she urged John to like wine had he ever cared for anything of the kind. One year of constant indulgence, with her approbation, had made him a drunkard and her a widow.

Years passed, Mrs. Fenton's father died, great changes came about, and she found herself surrounded by relatives from the scenes of earlier days. She had become a lovely Christian woman devoted to her little girl.

One afternoon, as they were taking a walk together, Jenny said, "Mamma, that man is following us. He has been looking at us for ever so long."

"Never mind, dear," said Mrs. Fenton, hastening a little towards home. The gentleman quickened his steps, and meeting them face to face, asked the way to a certain place. He looked strangely excited, and his voice trembled. Mrs. Fenton, startled by something in his manner, gazed at him for a moment, and would have fallen fainting if the stranger had not caught her. Jenny never knew exactly how she came to be unacquainted of the wonderful fact that this was her father come back to be very kind and very loving, able to give her all the beautiful things her mother had not been able to afford. She never knew anything of the confession made to her mother, who learned how John had been persuaded to live, but had felt himself dead to everything good. He had sunk lower and lower, but at last away in California, had been converted, had gone steadily to work, had been very successful in everything but his efforts to find his wife. It had been a terrible experience for both husband and wife, but out of it all had come a great blessing.—Freeman.

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The Angel of Little Sacrifices.

Have you ever seen her work? Have you never at least, felt her influence? In every Christian family God has placed the angel of little sacrifice, trying to remove all thorns, to lighten all the burdens, to share all the fatigues. We feel that she is with us, because we no longer experience that misunderstanding of heretofore, those deliberate coolnesses which spoil family life, because we no longer hear those sharp, rude words which wound so deeply, and life is sweeter.

The angel of little sacrifice has received from heaven the mission of those angels of whom the prophet speaks, who remove the stones from the road, lest they should bruise the feet of the travelers. There is a place less commodious than another—she chooses it, saying with a sweet smile, "How comfortable I am here!"

There is some work to be done, and she presents herself for it, simply, with the joyous manner of one who finds her happiness in so doing. How many overights repaid by this one unknown hour! How many little joys produced for another, without her ever having mentioned to anyone the happiness which they would give her!

Does a dispute arise? She knows how to settle it by a pleasant word that would do no one, and falls upon the slight disturbance like a ray of sunlight upon a cloud.

Should she hear of two hearts estranged, she has always new means of reuniting them, without their being able to show her any gratitude, so sweet, simple and natural is what she does. But who will tell the thorns that have torn her hand, the pain her heart has endured? And yet she is always smiling.

Have you never seen her at work, the angel of little sacrifice? How many a friend, a sister, a wife. In heaven she is called a saint.—French Writer.

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