

The Sabbath-School.

WITNESS OF JESUS TO JOHN.

MARCH 6th.

LUKE VII : 19-28.

Golden Text : John 5 : 35.

COMPARE Matt. 11 : 1-15. John was at this time imprisoned in the castle of Macharus near the Dead Sea. For the cause of his imprisonment see Mark 6 : 17-20. Jesus was at Nain in Galilee where he had just restored the widow's son to life. Vs. 19 : 20. John sends messengers bidding them ask Jesus,—*Art thou he, &c. ?* Strange question for John to ask ! Had he forgotten the voice from heaven at the Lord's baptism ? Matt. 3 : 17. But he was in prison, depressed in spirit, perhaps foreseeing his own tragic end, Mark 6 : 27. Perhaps becoming impatient for a distinct avowal by Jesus of his Messiahship. Nay, may he not for the moment have indulged the thought, why should I thus pine in prison ? If this be indeed the Messiah, would he not effect my release ? Or, it may have been to satisfy the doubts of disciples weaker in the faith than himself, who saw nothing of the power and grandeur about Jesus in which they expected the Messiah to come. *That should come*—because foretold by prophets and expected by the Jews. Quote some of the Prophecies. Vs. 21, 22. *In that same hour*—they find Jesus in the very midst of his miraculous activity, fulfilling to the letter predictions concerning him, Isa. 35 : 5, 6. No formal declaration was necessary : they need only look round them to be convinced. The recital of what they now saw and heard would be understood by John as an affirmative answer to his question, see John 5 : 36. V. 23. *Blessed is he*—who, in spite of persecution and sorrow, believeth in me. An intimation needed just then by John and his disciples, and needed by Christians now and to the end of time, see 1 Peter 2 : 7-9. Vs. 24-26. The eulogy pronounced upon John was no flattery, but a grand testimony to his sterling worth put in then and there, lest those around should lose their faith in John from the question he had asked, or should misinterpret Christ's answer given in the hearing of the people. *A reed shaken with the wind*—see Isa. 42 : 3, a fragile rush, emblem of vacillating weaklings like themselves. *Soft clothing*—an antithesis betwixt John's rough camel's hair garment, Matt. 3 : 4, and the gorgeous apparel of Herod and his courtiers. In this case they would find "the weakling" in the palace, not in the prison. *A prophet*—yes, the last and greatest of the prophets, sent as the Herald to prepare the way for Messiah. Vs. 27, 28. *This is he*—compare Mal. 3 : 1, who there testifies as to the nature of Him whom John was to precede, "The Lord whom ye seek." By thus quoting Malachi Jesus testifies to his own Messianic character. *He that is least in the kingdom of heaven*—the seeming paradox is explained by applying the surprising limitation to the prophets, or teachers, of the New Testament. *Their office is "greater,"* inasmuch as John only prophesied of a coming Christ, *they, of a crucified, risen, and glorified Redeemer*, 2 Corin. 3 : 6-11.

The Sinners Friend.

MARCH 13th.

LUKE VII : 36-50.

Golden Text : Luke 7 : 48.

THIS INCIDENT, recorded only by Luke, is quite distinct from the anointing in Matt. 26 : 6, Mark 14 : 3-9, and John 12 : 2-9. This was in the house of Simon the Pharisee, in Galilee ; the other, in that of Simon the leper, at Bethany. It was customary for guests to *recline* at full length at meal-times upon raised benches furnished with cushions. These were ranged in the centre of the room, forming three sides of a hollow square. The open side afforded ingress to the servants. The space behind permitted strangers to pass round to see the guests and converse with them. It was unusual for women to do this. How came this woman to be admitted ? In the crowd she escaped notice. Perhaps she had listened before to the Lord's gracious invitation,—*"Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,"* and now she *would come* to the friend of sinners—just as she was. V. 36, 37. *One of the Pharisees*—Simon, v. 43. *Sat down*—reclined. *The city*—probably Capernaum. *A sinner*—no clue to her name, but the representative of a numerous class. *She knew*—had been told that Jesus was to be there. *A box of ointment*—the usual marble cruse containing liquid perfume. V. 38. *Stood at his feet*—The position of the guests made it easy for her to do all that is here described. *Wiping*—in deep humiliation, and wiping the flood of tears that fell on her Saviour's feet, the expression of a heart moved to contrition at a sense of its own sinfulness in the presence of infinite purity, and symbolizing her submission to the meanest office, as even Christ himself afterwards did, John 13 : 5. *Kissed his feet*—as one unworthy to kiss his cheek. Vs. 39-43. Simon had invited Jesus to his house, that he might come to a definite opinion respecting him, ch. 4 : 22 and 5 : 21. Now, he thinks he has solved the mystery. He must be an imposter, else he would not have allowed this woman to touch him ! But the Lord saw through him and by a master-stroke, like Nathan with David, 2 Sam. 12 : 7, he makes him condemn himself. Jesus Himself is the creditor. In the two debtors, we have the portraits of the woman and of Simon. He leaves Simon to apply the moral. V. 44. The woman's loving service rebukes the haughty Pharisee, who had omitted even the common courtesies of society—water to wash his feet—the usual kiss of welcome—and the fragrant oil with which the oriental visitor was anointed. *She had done what she could*, Mark 14 : 8. *Forgiven, for she loved much*—Not that her love was the procuring cause of her pardon. The parable teaches the reverse—that the debtor's love towards his creditor is awakened only when he, on good grounds, believes that the debt is cancelled. The woman's "loving much" proved to the Saviour her faith. The other loved little, because he felt little need of forgiveness. V. 50. *Thy faith*—That is the first step, Acts 16 : 31. Next, love, Gal. 5 : 6. Then an express love of love in acts, 1 John 3 : 17. The effect of these—PEACE—leading to quietness and assurance forever, Isa. 32 : 17.