

SUNDAY
SCHOOL

The Quiet Hour

YOUNG
PEOPLE

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER*

By Rev. Mr. McMillan, M.A., Winnipeg.

By parables, v. 2. There is a Hindu fashion of making jewel caskets of a large number of boxes of increasing size, which fit in succession one within another with the utmost nicety. When a Rajah sends such a present to his bride, her curiosity is excited and stimulated as she opens one after another of the boxes, until at last she comes to the jewel sparkling in its nest in the centre. There is always attraction in mystery. We want what is withheld more than what is proffered. So Jesus would compel the people to listen, and think, and wonder, and guess, and discuss, and fairly puzzle—and bewilder themselves, into seeking the truth.

Hear, and not understand, v. 12. An old Jewish proverb says that there are four kinds of readers. First, the sponges, who absorb all they read and return it again a little dirtied; second, the sand-glasses, who let the words run through them without any effect whatever; third, the strain-bags, who allow a great part to run away and retain the dregs; fourth, the diamonds, who, as these jewels reject all but the pure white light of heaven and flash it back in brilliance, select what is valuable as they read, and use it for the enlightenment of the world. We may ask ourselves, in which way do we read?

Soweth the word, v. 14. In the laboratory of a well equipped agricultural college you will see at one table a student patiently picking over by hand a little pile of tiny grass seed, examining it grain by grain, to separate the weeds, and select the best seed; while, at another table, the hardness of different wheat grains is being tested by an ingenious machine, and carefully registered. The aim of all this labor is to provide farmers with the very best seed to sow in their fields. During centuries upon centuries the good seed of God's Word has been producing the most blessed results in human hearts and homes and institutions. It has been thoroughly tested; we may depend upon it, so we only hear and heed it, to bring forth in us fruit that will abide and satisfy.

By the way side, v. 15. Hearts become hard in the same way that footpaths do, by constant trampling upon them. Vain and silly thoughts trip swiftly and tirelessly back and forward. Every indulgence of the flesh stamps with feet of iron. Rejected reproofs, omitted duties, broken promises, march ponderously upon its sensitive surfaces. As a cattle path across a meadow is lower and harder and blacker than the greensward it divides, so is the path of a bad habit upon a human heart. No grass or grain can grow upon the cattle path, nor can the good seed of the kingdom sprout in the track of an evil habit.

Stony ground, v. 16. The ground freezes five feet deep in a Manitoba winter. As soon as the sun of April has loosened an inch or two of the surface, the farmer hurries to sow the wheat. Then for a month or six weeks later the sunshine is gradually melting the ice beneath the growing plant, and so drawing up moisture to feed and strengthen it. Suppose now that that ice were rock, which would not melt or emit moisture, but grew even hotter and hotter until it shrivelled and baked the tender plants! The surface soil stands for the emotions, beneath which are character and will. If these latter respond, they bless and fructify

*S. S. Lesson, April 29, 1906.—Mark 4: 1-20. Commit to memory v. 20. Read Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 8:5-18. Golden Text.—The seed is the word of God.—Luke 8:11.

the planting of religion. If they do not, and nothing of us but our feelings has been engaged, that planting is soon scorched and parched out of existence.

Bring forth fruit, v. 20. Some thousands of Canadian farmers receive every year, for purposes of experiment, seed of approved varieties of grain. This seed they sow according to definite directions, and report the results. The reports are carefully filed and examined. They show which variety of seed has, on the average, produced the best results. And that fixes the value of the seed. It is only the fruit-bearing qualities that count. There is a record of results in heaven. It tells whether there is fruit in our lives corresponding to all our privileges. Oh, the joy that will be ours, if at the last the Lord of the harvest is satisfied with our record.

LIGHT FROM THE EAST.

By Rev. James Ross, D.D.

Parables—Stories to illustrate spiritual truth are common in all ancient literature. Many Egyptian tales that have come down to us, begin on the ordinary level of human life, and then rise into a fanciful or metaphorical strain, which brings out, even more directly, the truth intended to be conveyed. Jewish writers say that the law was like a great palace that had many doors, so that people lost their way in it, till one of their teachers who used parables came, and he fastened a ball of thread to the chief entrance, so that all could readily find their way in and out.

Hundredfold—We never get so large a yield as this in any ordinary kind of grain. We sow about two bushels to the acre, and reap from fifteen to a hundred. But in the East they have a peculiar way of calculating. They allow one-third of the seed for the birds, another third is supposed to be destroyed by mice and insects, and only one-third actually grows. Thus, if a farmer sowed three bushels and reaped a hundred, he would have a hundredfold. Then, different kinds of grain yield different returns. A kind of durrah or white maize sometimes yields four hundredfold according to the Eastern mode of calculation, that is, four hundred bushels for every twelve sown.

ALWAYS SAFE WITH HIM.

"In heavenly love abiding.

No change my heart shall fear,

And safe is such confiding

For nothing changes here.

The storm may roar without me,

My heart may low be laid,

But God is round about me

And can I be dismayed?

"Whenever He may guide me,

No want shall turn me back;

My Shepherd is beside me,

And nothing can I lack.

His wisdom ever waketh,

His sight is never dim.

He knows the way He taketh,

And I will walk with Him."

Christ's resurrection set the seal of truth on all his claims, declared him with power to be the Son of God, and gave his words and work such a stamp of authority as precludes their being gainsaid or overthrown. The resurrection once accepted as an indisputable fact everything before it, the miraculous birth, the perfect, sinless life, the miracles one and all, as well as the divinely ordered history which preceded, and the record of it—becomes probable not only, but natural and necessary. His resurrection makes equally natural and consistent with his claims, the ascension, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the progressive conquest of the world in the centuries since that first Easter morning.

THE POWER OF AN UNATTAINED WEAL.

By Charles R. Brown.

"I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting—and teaching—I press toward the mark.—Phil. 3:13.

How unfortunate and how disagreeable are the people who have entirely caught up with their ideals! They started out some time ago to achieve certain definite results and have practically achieved them. They proposed to themselves a not very difficult nor lofty programme, and they seem to be carrying it out with scarcely a hitch or a jar. And because they have thus attained, they are not only dry, hard, impervious—they are also apt to look down upon the rest of us who are still striving and struggling, longing and failing, with quite a complacent and patronizing air. They contribute little or nothing to the moral advance of society and they actually clog the wheels by their own self-satisfaction.

There was that Pharisee who went into the Temple to pray. You heard what he said in his prayer. "God, I thank Thee that I am just as I am. Other men are unjust, extortioners, adulterers; but not I. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all that I possess." And that was all! Not a hint of any penitence or yearning; not a word of aspiration or unsatisfied longing. He had all he wanted and simply dropped in to tell the Lord how thoroughly satisfied he was. He did not stand in the number of those on whom Christ pronounced his benediction—"Blessed are the poor in spirit!" The Pharisee felt that he was exceedingly well-to-do in spirit. I have wondered many times that the publican was able to offer his prayer of honest humility "God be merciful to me, a sinner," with that self-satisfied fellow standing up in front of him. The Pharisee had entirely caught up with his ideals and Jesus painted his portrait in the New Testament as a perpetual warning to us all!

How far removed from that mood is this man Paul! He, too, had made considerable headway in spiritual achievement. He was the most successful missionary the world has ever known, making the Christian faith effective in all the larger centres around the Mediterranean. He gained such insight that he was caught up into "the third heaven" of spiritual privilege. He penned that hymn to charity, which as a tribute to the real essence of Christian life has never been surpassed. Yet with all this, when he takes stock of his spiritual attainments, he is more than modest—he is full of an unsatisfied longing. "Not as though I had attained, or were already made perfect," he cries. "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind and reaching forth unto the things which are ahead, I press toward the mark!" He felt within his soul the power of an unattained ideal, which hung before him as the brightest constellation in his sky.

"You notice first his frank confession—"I count not myself to have attained."—These holiness people, who never sin and who are already made perfect, are farther along than Paul was, according to their own estimate. Possibly a more accurate appraisal might indicate otherwise—it may be that they have forgotten to read that other statement by Paul, "Let no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think but think soberly." When he says, "I count not myself to have attained," he not only wins our sympathy, he persuades us of the moral soundness of his nature. Hunger is always a sign of health. Spiritual appetite is a prophecy of spiritual growth. The beatitudes are almost entirely for those who are con-