

The Seven Sisters.

Seven sisters came my way,
Crowned with gold and shod with gray,
Travelling in single file,
Each abode with me awhile,
Each brought nothing in her hand,
Save a passport to the land,
And the promise soon to bring
Each a present to her king.

When the first one left the door,
In her gracious hand she bore
Fairer gift of all the seven,
Incense made of prayers to heaven,
After her another sped
With a gift of wheaten bread,
Two a little garment took;
One a poem, one a book,
Over which an ailing child
Half forgot his grief and smiled,
So in turn the sisters passed,
Each one laden save the last,
She stalked sullenly away,
Clad from head to foot in gray.

Seven sisters came to seek
Each a good gift from the week,
Six returned with what they sought
Something said, or something wrought;
But the sister clad in gray,
Was a little wasted day.

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Rev. W. H. Withrow, D.D., Editor.

TORONTO, APRIL 24, 1897.

"AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS."

BY REV. SAMUEL GREGORY.

"The king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways.—Ezek. 21. 21.

TRAVEL TRACKS IN AFRICA

How does an explorer travel in Africa? I have no doubt some of you have supposed (as I did), that an explorer holds a mariner's compass in his hand, and makes his course like a bee or a wild stag straight across the country, treading through the long grass and bushes and between forest trees. That is, the explorer has no roads on which to travel.

Now in reality it is all very different. Africa is full of ways about a foot wide, like those by which you cross English fields. The natives of Africa have made those paths by simply treading the ground with their feet, and not as the Romans used to make their wonderful paved roads. These narrow African travel-ways, zig-zag through valleys, forests, open grassy lands, over hillsides; and that great country is filled with a net-work of such pathways. What the explorer has to do is to select which path he wants.

Sometimes a traveller in Africa comes to the parting of the ways—a place where paths fork away in different directions, and he stands puzzled unless he has a good guide. One of those paths may lead him to where he will have to spend the night in a dark forest where lions roar for prey; another would take him to where black people of some village could give him food and shelter.

In English country districts when you come to a parting of the ways, there is a white post with boards like arms pointing down the different roads, and the boards bear on them names of the places to which those roads lead. You, perhaps have seen that picture of an old

gentleman whose sight was not good, standing up on the saddle of his pony trying to read the pointing board, and learn which way he ought to go.

THE TWO PATHS OF LIFE.

Now life has many paths. There are all sorts of ways of going through the world—all sorts of ways of living and behaving. Some of the ways are right, some of them are wrong.

If you open the Book of Psalms you find that the first psalm is a poem on this subject. Over it you might write for a title—"The Two Ways." That psalm tells us there are ways that lead to happiness; and to prosperity. It also tells us that there are ways which lead to certain destruction. That psalm says, that a man who chooses that good way, is like a grand tree growing by a river, and that a man who chooses the bad way is like chaff which the wind blows to nowhere.

In the same way Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, spoke about the Two Ways. He tells us there is a broad bad road full of people, and that there is a narrow way—straight as a rule can make it—which is the right way, though there are not so many people travelling on the narrow way.

SWITCHES ON THE RAILWAY.

As you travel by rail, you know that in some places the train gives a sudden jerk. It has come to a switch on the rails. From that point the lines of metal lie in different directions. The pointsman is watching, and when the train is due he pulls a handle, and puts the train on one set of metals or on the other according to its destination. It is his business to stand at the parting of the ways, and give right direction to the train. Sad mistakes are sometimes made—carriages full of people are mis-directed, and there is accident and trouble.

COMPANIONSHIP.

Jesus once told a story about a Farmer's Son, at the parting of the ways. He was well-off at home, but he was not contented. He thought village life dull and work hard. He had heard of life in other places, and wanted to see it. Should he stop at home and work at the farm business? or should he go wandering? He often thought about it, and one day off he went. He was merry as a grasshopper at first, but was soon in trouble among strangers and in want. Then he thought of those old days at home and wished he had stayed there, and one day started back and found welcome home again.

Jesus wanted to teach us by that story how we mistake the road, and what to do when we find out our mistake. Go back again to God our Father.

What brought that young man wrong at the parting of the way—was bad companions. You have heard of the Scotch poet, Robert Burns. He had a good father, and the boy's heart was good. But he went for two years to a neighbouring town, and found a youth older than himself whose ways were bad. Robert Burns stood at the parting of the ways. At first he was shocked by the wickedness of his new associate. But in a while he was going along the same road. Then his life instead of being noble and good was not good, and his story is a story of mistakes. He used to say he had not good aim for his life, and had therefore gone all wrong.

Sometimes when a boy goes to school he is in similar danger. He is at the parting of the ways. He may fall into a good set of boys, or become one of a set not so good. And in our companionships it is as in our walks. We keep moving on without thinking much about it, and before we know it, are surprised to find how far we have moved.

It is more dangerous still when youths go to business. They are again at the parting of the ways. Some of their new companions are probably not good to associate with, and some are of a spirit to help them to noble life. On the sort of companionship which you form how much depends!

CONVICTIONS.

But you are put at the parting of the ways by those convictions which the Spirit of God works in your minds. This is what I mean: You go along anyhow, and one day something makes you think, "What am I going to be and do?" You feel you would like to be a follower of Jesus, and you hesitate, and as it were stand at the cross-roads.

It was so with John Bunyan. He was not a good boy. I am sorry to say he used bad language. One day a woman spoke to him in the street about something she heard him say, as he stood among his companions. And he hung his head with shame, and began to wish to be better.

He lived, as you know, to write a lit-

tle book about the Way of Life—a book called The Pilgrim's Progress. It is a wonderful book, and one of the most interesting in the world. And that book, better than any other I know of, tells of the ways of this life, and where they part from the true, and where they lead those who set their feet upon them.

One Sunday a boy was in the street just passing away time. He thought about nothing and cared for nothing. A lady came along, looked at him and said: "Are you going to spend the evening about the street? Come with me to the place of worship I am going to!" He hesitated. He stood at the parting of the ways. Then he went as he was asked to do. The boy listened to the sermon which was preached and to the hymns, and went again and again. He grew up and became a missionary. His name was John Williams. He went to the South Sea Islands, and the story of his work for the Lord Jesus Christ, is one of the most wonderful of all such stories.

Now as you grow older, these calls of God will sound in your hearts. You will seem to have God's hand gently laid upon you, and to hear God's voice speaking to you. Mind at such times. That is to be at the parting of the ways. So the Parting of the Ways means those times and places when temptation tries to pull us in the wrong way, and the Spirit of God is striving to lead us in the right way. All through life we keep coming to where two ways meet.

THE COASTLAND PATH.

By the sea in Cornwall there are paths which run over the cliffs. Below you lies the great sea so wide in its spaces, so lovely in its colour, and between you and the water, far below, are vast walls of jagged rock. You are safe on the path. It is a path made for coast-guardsmen. It is narrow, and here and there beside it lies a stone dashed with whitening, so that you can catch sight of it in the dusk of the evening. Those white stones are to guide when the path itself cannot be seen. Look for those white stones, and you cannot get lost, however far you walk.

Well, life has deep dangerous places, but you may, if you will, walk along as safely and joyously, as you walk on those grand heights by the blue sea. But you must keep the proper path—Christ's narrow way. It is easy to find. God has set the white marks all the way along. Verses of the Bible and lives of good people are the white marks, which help to make us sure which is the true path. It is the path we talk of when we read that verse in the psalm: "They go from strength to strength till every one of them appears in Zion before God."

HARRY'S DIARY.

Harry's face was radiant with delight when Aunt Bessy gave him a pretty little diary on New Year's morning. He loved to write, and he was sure that he would spend many happy hours in filling its pages with a record of his daily doings.

Upon the first page he wrote in a plain, round hand a list of the resolutions he had made for the new year; and he determined to record the broken ones as well as those he succeeded in keeping.

Aunt Bessy was surprised, one afternoon, to discover Harry sitting in his room, mournfully turning over the pages of his diary.

"Why, Harry, my boy, what is the matter?" Aunt Bessy asked, sitting down beside the manly little fellow, and putting a loving arm on his knee.

"It's my diary. There are so many bad things in it that I can't bear to look over it. I've broken all my resolutions ever so many times, though I've tried to keep them, and I'm so discouraged. I don't mean to keep a diary any more. I don't want all the wrong things I do to be written down in a book, and I've been trying to rub them out."

"Did you ever think of that other Book where every word and thought and deed of your life is continually being recorded?" asked Aunt Bessy, as she smoothed his tumbled hair. "If your diary is so full of wrong-doing that you cannot bear to look over it, what must the record be in that other Book?"

The tears almost started, and Harry said, with a little show of effort in his voice:

"Oh, aunty! that must be nothing but sins. I can rub things out of my diary, but I never can take anything out of that Book.—can I?"

"No, darling, you cannot blot out one wrong deed; but do you know what will make it pure and white?" asked Aunt Bessy, tenderly.

"The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin," she repeated softly, as Harry looked up with a questioning face.

"That will blot out all our transgressions; for we have God's own promise for it. We might well be discouraged, and give up in despair, if we had only our own righteousness to depend upon; for not even an hour is sinless, but we can trust ourselves to Christ's righteousness. You may rub the record of your failures out of your little diary, and no one will know of them but yourself; but the page will not be pure and white as it was before, for it will show the marks of the rubbing. It will not be so with the pages of that other Book; for the Saviour's blood will blot out all the dark records of sin, and make it spotless. Are you trusting in him, Harry, or are you trying to walk in your own strength?"

"I am trusting Jesus," said Harry, as he straightened himself up with manful determination.—"I am trusting Jesus."

JUNIOR EPWORTH LEAGUE.
PRAYER-MEETING TOPIC.

MAY 2, 1897.

Jacob into Egypt.—Genesis 46. 1-7.

CHANGE OF NAME.

Israel was formerly known as Jacob. The words are very significant. Jacob means supplanter, but Israel means "a prince." Jacob gained a memorable victory, when he wrestled all night in prayer, and conquered the angel, for which he received a new and illustrious name. His life had been one of great sorrow, arising from the loss of his favourite son, Joseph, whose remarkable career in Egypt was a clear indication of the Divine hand in the affairs of life. This same Joseph, whom he supposed to have been dead for many years, was not only alive, but was actually making provision for the declining years of his venerable father, and had now sent conveyances to carry him and his household into Egypt.

ISRAEL'S COURSE.

He acknowledged God by offering sacrifices. The place where he presented the worship was memorable in the history of his family, as there both Abraham and Isaac had been accustomed to worship. His father and grandfather had both set good examples to their descendants, which he, Israel, was now imitating. What a grand thing it is to have a pious ancestry. Are not some of our young friends the children of pious parents? You can doubtless call to mind seasons when your parents have been made special prayer on your behalf.

WORTHY EXAMPLE.

Jacob prayed for divine guidance. He was entering upon a new mode of life. He was surprised at its occurrence, but he took counsel from God, which was a wise plan. Never be afraid to consult your heavenly Father. He will guide you into all truth. Talk to God about all your affairs. I knew a little boy who was accustomed to pray to God to help him in his studies, and he declared that he could always study better after praying.

HOW GOD ANSWERED.

Verse 3. God renewed the covenant which he had made, first with Abraham and then with Isaac, and promised to go with him into Egypt. This would be inspiring to the old man, for Jacob was now 130 years old, and he would necessarily be more or less anxious respecting his journey, and what he might have to encounter in Egypt. But when God thus made known himself, and reaffirmed his promises, Jacob would feel a degree of confidence which he did not have before. God always takes care of those who trust in him, and though he may not answer every prayer in the same identical manner, he will fulfil his promises, and care for his own. Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you if he does not answer every prayer as you would desire, he will give you grace to bear every disappointment.

Claus Harnes, one of the most useful preachers in Germany, once met a friend to whom he told how many times daily he was obliged to speak. His friend presently asked: "But, Friend Harnes, if thou hast so much to say, when art thou still? And when does the Spirit of God speak to thee?" That simple question so impressed Harnes that he resolved from that time to devote a portion of each day to retirement and silent study.

He is convinced of it.—"This is a hard world," said one labourer to another. "Yes. Ol do be thinkin' av that! Ivery time Ol put me pick-axe inth it."