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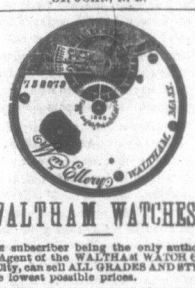

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Lesson XI. Dec. 16. Judges 16: 21-31.

DEATH OF SAMSON.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Great men are not always wise."—Job 32: 9.

I. THE PHILISTINE OPPRESSION.—In the Maritime Plain on the southwest of Palestine, between the Mediterranean and the Hills of Judah, lay a very rich country, "whose striking and characteristic feature was its immense fields of grain." This fertile country was held by the Philistines. This warlike nation had overrun the southwestern part of Israel's possession for 40 years (13: 1). "They climbed the passes at their will, and harried the valleys, carrying off not only the harvest when ripe, but even men, women, and children to slavery. To secure the permanence of the conquest, they had, however, so completely disarmed the Hebrews as to force them to descend to a Philistine city for even the slightest repairs of their agricultural implements; no worker in iron being allowed among them" (1 Sam. 13: 19-21). It was against such an enemy that Samson was raised up.

II. SAMSON, ISRAEL'S HERO DEFENDER.—1. *His early life.* Samson means *sunlike*, the *sun-hero*; or, as Bertheau thinks, *the destroyer*. He was born at Zorah, in the tribe of Dan, near the northwest borders of Judah. It was close to the country of the Philistines. His father's name was Manoah of the tribe of Dan. His birth was announced by an angel, as if he were to have some special mission (see Judg. 13).

2. *His strength.* Samson was miraculously endowed with strength, which, in general, he used to deliver his nation from the power of the oppressor, although not always in the wisest way. He tore a lion to pieces with his hands; he carried off the city gates of Gaza; he slew a thousand warriors with the jaw-bone of an ass for his only weapon. Samson's great strength was an endowment from God (Judg. 13. 25), on condition of his living the life of a Nazarite, "one separated." It required (Num. 6: 2-5) total abstinence from grapes, wine, and all intoxicating liquors; that the hair should go uncut; and that all contamination with dead bodies be avoided. It was usually a temporary vow, but Samuel, Samson, and John the Baptist were perpetual Nazarites. The meaning of the vow was probably "entire consecration to God."

3. *His work.* Living in a region peculiarly exposed to the raids of the Philistines, Samson was for 20 years a bulwark against their incursions. He raised no armies; he organized no warfare, but only performed feats of heroism and prowess. These are recorded in chapters 14 and 15.

4. *His character.* Samson, with a gift which might have been of great use, was yet morally weak, and lived far from an exemplary life. He was generally devoted to the cause of his people. He was good natured.

III. SAMSON'S FALL. Vers. 21-25. FIRST, FROM WHAT HE FELL. Four times it is declared that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him" in connection with his feats of strength (13: 25; 14: 6, 19; 15: 14). This was the philosophy of all his strength. He departed from God, and then "the Lord departed from him."

SECOND, THE CAUSE OF HIS FALL. He yielded to his own blind passions, and trampled on the law of his God. He did not fall at once. He tampered with appetite and gratified his animal desires; and thus gradually sliding away from the virtuous and true, he lost his power before he was aware of it.

THIRD, TO WHAT HE FELL. 21. *But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes:* instead of putting him to death. Thus, effectually, as they thought, preventing any future mischief on his part, while they prolonged their own triumph and revenge. *And bound him with fetters of brass:* rather, copper. Common prisoners were bound with ropes or thongs. *And he did grind in the prison house.* This task was usually performed by female slaves.

22. *Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again.* The meaning is that he had now his full head of hair again. From the return of his strength with the growth of his hair, we can only understand that he repented, and renewed voluntarily the vows of devotement which had been imposed upon him before his birth, and which he had so miserably broken.

23. *Then the lords of the Philistines gathered them together:* probably at Gaza (ver. 21). *Unto Dagon their god:* a sea idol described in 1 Sam. 5: 4. *Our god hath delivered.* They attributed their victory to their god, and hence regarded the idol as superior to Jehovah, whose servant was overthrown.

24. *They praised their god.* Samson now saw with deep intensity of shame and sorrow how the name of the Lord had been dishonored through his misconduct. Yet out of this despair he gathered hope. It was no longer a matter between Samson and the Philistines, but between Dagon and Jehovah.

25. *Call for Samson, that he may make us sport.* Rather, *that he may play for us, i. e.*, dance and make music. The sexes were mingled in the ancient Eastern dance. The dance was considered a gymnastic exercise fit for a warrior. The idea, doubtless, is simply that he should be brought out to become a laughing-stock to them, a butt for their scoffs, mockeries, and insults. *And they set* (or placed) *him between the pillars:* in full view of the people. He was not made to dance between the two pillars, but to stand there, after the dancing was done, to receive the jests of the lordly feasters.

IV. SAMSON'S REPENTANCE AND TRIUMPHANT DEATH. Vers. 26 31. The *first* mark of repentance is implied in the growth of his hair and the return to his Nazarite vow, as we have seen above. The *second* reason for believing that Samson repented is the effect of trial and sorrow upon one who is true at heart, especially as seen in the light of his last hours.

26. *And Samson said unto the lad.* Being blind, a boy was employed to lead him about by the hand, and place him where he was required to go. *Suffer me that I may feel the pillars.* He probably was weary, not merely pretended to be, with his dancing and enduring the mockery of the crowds. *Whereupon the house standeth.* It appears from the narrative that there was a flat roof, from the top of which everything, as well as under it, spectators could see what was being done on the stage in front, and that this roof was mainly supported by two pillars, standing, apparently, in the centre of the open front of the building and so close to the stage without. The lords and principal persons seem to have sat within, *under* the roof, while the people, to the number of 3,000, stood *on* the flat roof.

28. *And Samson called unto the Lord.* This is *the third* evidence of his repentance. *That I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes.* It must be borne in mind that the words of Samson are not a mere vindictive imprecation on those who had personally injured him. If he had had no higher or worthier motive than this, the Lord would not have accepted his prayer, and answered it as he did.

30. *Let me die with the Philistines:* I am willing to die, if only I can accomplish this victory. It is not a wish for death in itself considered,—though he had little to live for,—but "the blinded man perceives that the present moment holds out an occasion for victory, and avails himself of it, notwithstanding that it must cost him his own life." *And the house fell.* When the pillars were removed, the weight of 3 000 people brought the roof down with a fearful crash, and those above fell upon those below, together with the stones and timber, and a great slaughter was the result, Samson himself perishing under the ruins. *Upon the lords.* They are mentioned first because their death was of great political significance. The great numbers who perished would have had little effect upon the relations of the Philistines and the Israelites, if among them had not been the civil and military leaders of the former. *The dead which he slew at his death.* If three thousand were on the roof, there were doubtless as many more below.

31. *Eshtaol:* a village near Zorah. *Judged Israel twenty years.* He must have began his career of judge quite young, as the Philistine oppression lasted but 40 years (13: 1) and he was born after it began (13: 5). His office of judge was probably confined to the southwestern part of Canaan, to Dan, and the neighboring tribes.

How "Fishin' Jimmy" Came to Christ.

We cite from an exquisite character sketch by Miss Annie Trumbull Slosson, in the New Princetown Review, his own account of his conversion by the old New England fisherman, and the view, from his standpoint, of the preaching of his Lord and Saviour.

'Twas late, most 'leven o'clock, an' the sermon had had begun. There was a strange man a-preachin', some one from over to the hotel. I never heerd his name, I never seed him from that day to this; but I knowed his face. Queer enough I'd seed him a-fishin'. I never knowed he was a min'ster, he didn't look like one. He went about like a real fisherman, with old clo'es, an' an ole hat with hooks stuck in it, an' big rubber boots, an' he fished, reely fished, I mean—ketched 'em. I guess 'twas that made me liss'n a leetle sharper'n us'al, for I never seed a fishin' min'ster afore. Elder Jacks'n, he said 'twas a sint'l waste o' time, an' ole Parson Loomis, he'd an idee it was cruel an' onmarciful; so I thought I'd jest see what this man 'd preach about, an' I settled down to liss'n to the sarm'n.

But there wa'n't no sarm'n, not what I'd been raised to think was the on'y true kind. There wa'n' no heads, no fustys nor sec'ndlys, nor fin'ly bruthrins, but the fust thing I knowed I was hearin' a story, an' 'twas a fishin' story. 'Twas about Some One—I hadn't the least idee then who 'twas an' how much it all meant—Some One that was dreffle fond o' fishin' and fishermen, Some One that sot everythin' by the water, an' useter go along by the lakes an' ponds, an' sail on them, an' talk with the men that was fishin'. An' how the fishermen all liked Him, an' asked His advice, an' done jest 's He telled 'em about the likeliest places to fish; an' how they allers ketched more fer mindin' Him; an' how when He was a-preachin' He wouldn't go into a big meetin'-house an' talk to rich folks all slicked up, but He'd jest go out in a fishin' boat an' ask the men to shove out a mite, an' He'd talk to the folks on shore, the fishin' folks an' their wives, an' the boys an' gals playin' on the shore. An' then, best of everythin', He telled how when He was a-choosin' the men to go about with Him an' help Him, an' larn His ways so's to come after Him, He fust o' all picked out the men He'd seen every day fishin'; an' mebbe fished with Himself, for He knowed 'em, an' knowed He could trust 'em.

An, then he telled us about the day when this preacher come along by the lake—a dreffle sightly place, this min'ster said; he'd seed it himself when he was trav'lin' in them countries—an' come acrost two men He knowed well; they was brothers, and they was a-fishin'. And He jest asked 'em in his pleasant-spoken, friend'ly way—there wa'n't never sech a drawin', talkin', lovin' way with any one afore as this man had, the min'ster said—he jest asked 'em to come along with Him; and they lay down their poles and their lines and everythin', and jined Him. And then he come along a spell further, and He sees two boys out with their ole father, and they was settin' in a boat, and fixin' up their tackle, and he asked 'em if they'd jine Him, too, and they jest dropped all their things, and left the old man with the boat and the fish and the bait, and followed the preacher. I don't tell it very good I've read it and read it sence that; but I want to make ye see how it sounded to me, how I took it, as the min'ster telled it that summer day in Francoxy meetin'. Ye see I'd no idee who the story was about, the man put it so plain, in common kind of talk, without any come-to-passes and whuffers and thuffers, and I never conceited 'twas a Bible narr'tive.

And so fust thing I knowed I says to myself 'That's the kind o' teacher I want If I could come acrost a man like that, I'd jest foller Him, too, through thick and thin.' Well, I can't put the rest on it into talk very good; 'taint jest the kind o' thing to speak on 'fore folks, even such good friends as you. I aint the sort to go back on my word—fishermen aint, ye know—and what I'd said to myself 'fore I knowed who I was bindin' myself to, I stuck to a'terwards when I knowed all about Him. For 'taint for me to tell ye, who've got so much more larnin' than me, that there was a dreffle lot more to that story than the fishin' part. That lovin' givin' up, suff'rin' dyin' part, ye know it all yerself, and I can't kinder say much on it, 'cept when I'm jest all by my self, or—'long o' Him.

That afternoon I took my ole Bible that I hadn't read much sence I growed up, and I went out into the woods 'long the river, and 'stid o' fishin', I jest sot down and read that hull story. Now ye know it yerself by heart, and ye've knowed it all yer born days, so ye can't begin to tell how new and astonishin' 'twas to me, and how findin' so much fishin' in it kinder helped me understand and bleeve it every mite, and take it right hum to me to foller and live up to 's long 's I live and breathe. Did I ever think on it, reely? I tell ye, His r'liging's a fishin' r'liging all through. His friends was fishin' folks; His pulpit was a fishin' boat, or the shore of the lake. He loved the ponds and streams; and when His d'sciples went out fishin', if He didn't go Himself with 'em, He'd go a'ter 'm, walkin' on the water, to cheer 'em up and comfort 'em.

An' He was allers 'round the water; for the story 'll say "He come to the seashore," or "He began to teach by the seaside," or agin' "He entered into a boat," an' "He was in the stern o' the boat, asleep."

An' He used fish in His min'cles. He fed that crowd o' folks on fish when they was hungry, bought 'em from a little chap on the shore. I've oft'n thought how dreffl tickled that boy must 'a' been to have Him take them fish. Mebbe they wasn't nothin' but shiners, but the fust the little feller'd ever ketched, an' boys sot a heap on their fust ketch. He was dreffle good to child'en ye know. An' who'd He come to a'ter He'd died an' ris ag'in? Why, He come down to the shore 'fore daylight, an' He looked off over the pond to where His ole frien's was a-fishin'. Ye see, they'd gone out jest to quiet their min'ds an' keep up their spirits; there's nothin' like fishin' for that, ye know, and they'd been in a heap o' trouble. When they was sittin' up the night 'afore, worryin' an' wond'rin' and s'misin' what was goin' to become on 'em without their Master, Peter got kinder desprit, and he up and says in his quick way, says he "Anyway, I'm goin' a-fishin'." And they all see the sense on it—any fisherman would—and they says, says they "We'll go 'long, too." But they didn't ketch anythin.' I suppose they couldn't fix their minds on it, and everythin' went wrong like. But when mornin' come creepin' come creepin' up over the mountings, fust thin' they knowed they see Him on the bank, and he called out to 'em to know if the'd ketched anythin'. The water jest run down my cheeks when I heerd the min'ster tell that, and it kinder makes my eyes wet every time I think on't. For't seem's if it might 'a' been me in that boat, who heern the Voice I loved so dreffle well, speak up agin so nat'ral from the bank there. And He eat some of their fish! O'course He done it to sot their minds easy, to show 'em He wa'n't quite a sperrit yit, but jest their own ole Frien' who'd been out in the boat with 'em so many, many times. But seems to me, jest the fac' He done it kinder makes fish and fishin' diffunt from any other thing in the hull airth. I tell ye them four books that gin His story is chock full o' things that go right to the heart of fishermen. Nets, and hooks and boats, and the shores, and the sea, and the mountings, Peter's fishin'-coat lillies, and sparrers, and all about the grass o' the fields, and all about the evenin' sky bein' red or lowerin', and, fair or foul weather.

It's an out-doors, woodsy, country story, besides bein' the heav'nliest one that was ever telled. I read the hull Bible, as a duty, ye know. I read the Epis'les, but somehow they don't come home to me. Paul was a great man, a dreffle smart scholar; but he was raised in the city, I guess, and when I go from the Gospils into Paul's writin's it's like goin' from the woods and hills and streams of Francony in the streets of a big city like Concord or Manch'ster.

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B. F. SIMPSON, Principal. 34-

Antigonish Heard From.

AFTON, Antigonish Co.,
October 11th, 1888.

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