

after a lingering illness of eighteen years, and his text was from Luke xiii. 16: "Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, to be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" It was a marvellously apt and beautiful text. And when the great naturalist and sacred scientist, the Rev. Professor Hitchcock—a man remarkable for his acquaintance with geology, chemistry, botany and zoology—died, the Rev. Dr. Tyler took for his text, in preaching his funeral sermon, 1 Kings vi. 33: "And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes."

Old Matthew Wilkes was every way an oddity in the pulpit, and was fond of taking texts of one word; he was, in spite of his eccentricities, an eminently useful man, and a very good preacher. We remember a fair illustration of his style in a text of this sort from John: "Afterwards." He began by deprecating the idea that he had taken the text for the purpose of showing the superior abilities of the preacher, remarking that "vanity is hateful in any place, but most in the pulpit; hateful in any person, but most in the minister; hateful in any age, but most in the age of gray hairs." Then followed a set of very natural divisions. "I. Men are indisposed to give up sin until they have felt the power of judgment, as the Lord said, 'I will yet bring one more plague upon Pharaoh, and afterwards he will let you go.' II. The power of remorse, as in Esau, 'Afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing, there was found no place for repentance.' III. As furnishing the point of view for earthly trouble: 'No afflictions are joyous, but grievous, but afterwards they yield the peaceable fruits of righteousness.' IV. Suggesting the anticipations of Heaven—'Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.' V. Suggesting warning for impenitence—'After death the judgment!' etc. A very brief outline of what seems to have been a very impressive sermon, and the very practical turn of which saves it from the appearance of being founded on a mere eccentricity. As singular an appropriation of a text as we ever remember to have met with was made by an obscure minister in a little seaboard village on the south coast, upon the occasion of its remoteness and isolation being invaded by a railway and its attendant train. Our old friend improved the occasion by discoursing from Nahum 1:4: "Chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against the other in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings."

Such illustrations as these do not offend good taste, and sometimes a text may be so impressive as to be really, in itself a sermon; it at once points and fixes the meditation of the hearer; and it has been very truly said by Dr. Leonard Withington, "I suppose a preacher may write a sermon on every text in the Book of Proverbs, and not forget the theme of Jesus Christ and him crucified, only it should be the determination of the preacher not to cramp a noble maxim in a narrow mind." It is the coarse and narrow mind which either, on the one hand, selects a text simply because it, perhaps, has a grotesqueness, or, having selected it, narrows it to a range of little and inconsequential observations.

This is very different from the folly and frippery of a preacher of whom we have heard, and whose sermons we

possess, who sought to crowd his empty pews by announcing, on successive Sunday evenings, such texts as "Nine-and-twenty knives," "A time to dance," "Alas, master, for it was borrowed," and so on.

Some ministers seem to deal with texts only in the method announced once by old Rowland Hill in happy irony, when he said, "First, we shall go through the text; second, we shall go round about the text; and third we shall go away from the text altogether." They take the third division at once, and go away from the text altogether, as we read of a clergyman, who, taking the text, " whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," devoted the entire sermon to an epitome of Sir Charles Bell's treatise on the anatomical and physiological properties of the human hand; another wrenched a text right away from its context, taking Judges iv. 20, when Sisera said to Jael, "Stand in the door of the tent, and it shall be, when any man doth come and inquire of thee, and say, Is there any man here? that thou shalt say, No!" The last four words were his text, "Thou shalt say, No," for a sermon on the importance of decision of character.

We should require much space, even if it were seemly for us to attempt to recite a title of the anecdotes of what may be called the reprehensible use of texts. There are stories of the selection of texts which only show an entire absence of every sentiment of reverence and proper regard for the sanctity of the divine Word. They remind us of the reproof given to that prelate who, when asked by some person, "Who preached to-day?" replied, "I preached myself." "Did you, indeed?" said his interrogator. "That is what Paul did not do; he preached Christ crucified!" When we hear of the ingenious handling of grotesque texts, we usually feel that the preacher has thought more of his ingenuity than his mission. Hamiton Paul must have been such a man. He took for a text for his farewell sermon at Ayr, "All wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him;" and for a funeral sermon for one of his parishioners of an exceedingly doubtful character, named Moses Marshall, "As for this Moses, we wot not what has become of him."—*Sunday at Home.*

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON.

(Specially prepared for the Christian Helper by Mrs. J. C. Felt.)

Sunday, April 17.

THE PHARISEES REPROVED.—Luke xi. 37-47.

GOLDEN TEXT, Matt. xxiii. 3.—All, therefore, whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works, for they say, and do not.

Commit—39-41.

INTRODUCTION AND CONNECTION.

Between our last lesson and this, we have several matters of great interest—as a visit of Jesus at the house of Mary and Martha; the model prayer He taught His disciples, and the accompanying instructions in regard to prayer: the casting out of a deaf and dumb devil, and sundry teachings which followed; but the length of time these occupied, and whether we find them related in the exact order of their occurrence or not, it is not easy to decide.

LESSON NOTES.

(37.) A certain Pharisee besought Him to dine with him, and He went in, and sat down to meat. These occasions were frequently made use of by the Pharisees for entrapping Jesus in His conversation; or for watching His actions and words, in order to find something of which to accuse Him. Jesus, on the other hand, availed Himself of them to teach them useful lessons; or to point out their false doctrines, and unmask their hypocritical pretences.

(38.) And when the Pharisee saw it—that is, that Jesus neglected the customary ablutions—he marvelled &c. The Jews had

become so accustomed to follow the Rabbinical traditions, that they accepted them as God's law; and submitted to them as binding, while many of them were not only not required by it, but were clearly opposed to its spirit. Among these were the ceremonial washing of hands when coming in from the markets, from business, from the courts of justice, and many other places where they had come in contact with those they called "sinners;" and also certain stipulated washings of cups, pots, brazen vessels, tables, &c.; not so much for the purpose of cleanliness, as for removing certain fancied moral pollutions.

Jesus, on several occasions, pointedly rebuked these hypocritical customs falsely called law; and exposed the baseness of those who made it their business to teach and enforce them. On the present occasion He ignored the custom of hand-washing altogether; and thus drew upon Himself the ill-disguised contempt of His host, who was only too glad of any occasion to find fault with Him.

(39.) It is not to be supposed that either the Pharisee or his guests were at all careful to conceal their surprise and displeasure at Jesus' neglect, and thus they drew upon themselves one of the most scathing and terrible of rebukes. And the Lord said unto him—answered to his probably unspoken thought—now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and platter &c. As if he had said—you attach great religious or ceremonial importance to outward observance, but do not look within into your own hearts—to see the corruption that reigns there;—your inward part is full of ravening (rapacity, violence) and wickedness. Though cloaked under the outward guise of sanctity and virtue, the Lord saw their hearts full of selfishness and base hypocrisy.

(40.) Fools, (senseless, unreasoning ones,) did not He that made that which is without—that which is apparent to the eye of man—make that which is within also?—And though the latter is hidden from man, are not both naked and open to His eye? and will not He demand cleanness of heart, without which all your outward ceremonies are only a vain and empty show?

(41.) But rather (than attending to the outward, and losing sight of the inward cleansing) give alms—that is, show kindness, pity to the poor, and such other heavenly graces as flow from inward purity. Of such things as ye have of your own, not of what you have extorted from others by rapacity and injustice. And behold all things are clean unto you—that is, having the inward cleansing that manifests itself in such actions, this external and pretentious show of outward cleansing will lose its importance.

(42.) Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye tithe (pay tithes of) mint and rue, and all manner of herbs—keep up the appearance of great sanctity in little, and comparatively unimportant things—and pass over—(utterly neglect)—judgment—just and upright dealing with men) and the love of God. Paying tithes was all right in itself, but could not make up for the lack of holiness of heart and life. These—judgment and the love of God—ought ye to have done—they were of the first importance—and not to have left the other undone. The former—paying tithes and other legal observances—should be only the visible expression of the inward principle of holiness.

(43.) Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats (seats of honor) in the synagogues, and greetings (such as are offered to superiors only) in the markets. The pride and self-complicity of the Pharisees are vividly exposed in the story of the Pharisee and Publican—ch. xviii. 10-12.

(44.) Woe unto you, Scribes (the copyists and expounders of the law, and learned men of the nation, otherwise called doctors of the law and lawyers) and Pharisees, hypocrites, (pretenders,—a name for both—) for ye are as graves that appear not, &c. The law made one that touched a grave ceremonially unclean—(Num. xix. 16). So all that came in contact with these men might account themselves polluted. See also Matt. xxiii. 27.

(45.) One of the lawyers said, &c. Being one of the same learned and influential class, this man could not but feel himself included in this censure, as indeed he was.

(46.) Woe unto you, lawyers! Why? Because ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne, &c. These were tasks and im-

positions of various kinds which they claimed as legal, and enforced with the utmost rigor, while their own lives were made shamelessly inconsistent—(Matt. xxiii. 4).

(47.) Woe unto you (all,—see Matt. xxiii. 29). Ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

This, too, was done in hypocritical pretence, and accompanied by the sanctimonious cant—if we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets: while all the time they possessed the same murderous spirit, as soon after appeared in their treatment of Christ and the apostles, and was, even then, clearly manifested in them—(see Matt. xxiii. 31).

SUGGESTED THOUGHTS.

No man is so mad as the hypocrite. His whole aim is to deceive men in regard to his real character, forgetting or ignoring the fact that God knows him as he is, and will by and by expose him with all his sins upon his head.

The blackest of all hypocrites is he who hides himself under the mask of religion—and especially under that of a religious teacher, while serving Satan and misleading souls.

Hypocrisy defeats its own ends, which are honor, influence, and reward; for soon exposed to bathing and contempt. Even hypocrites detest a hypocrite.

The life of the hypocrite is a gigantic lie towards men, and a prolonged insult and defiance of God. Of all such the Saviour's utterance is, woe, woe—only woe!

QUESTION SUMMARY.

(For the children.)

(37.) To whose house was Jesus invited? What did the Pharisee marvel at? Was this washing of hands just for cleanliness? No; it was a custom they followed, under pretence of having become unclean through touching or speaking to some one not as good as themselves. Why did Jesus not wash? Because it was not God's law, and was not necessary. (38.) What did Jesus say to the Pharisee? What did He mean? That he was making a great ado about outward things, forgetting the filth of his own heart. (40.) Why did He call the Pharisee fool? Because he forgot that God made him to be clean with a first of all; and if he was not clean in his heart, his outward cleansing would do him no good. (41.) What did He tell them all to do? What did He mean? That they were to show by kind and loving deeds that they had clean hearts. (42.) Why did He pronounce a woe upon them? Was that because they gave tithes (teaches) of those little things? No; but because they passed over (did not practise) something much more important—What was that? What did He mean by these?—What by the other? Then ought they to have done both? Which was most important? (43.) What two things is the woe for in this verse? What was the harm in the first?—in the second? See note. (44.) What did Jesus tell them they were like? What did He mean? See note. (45.) What did the lawyer say? Did he think Jesus meant him? (46.) Did Jesus mean him, too? What did He say to the lawyer? What did He mean? See note. Did they themselves do the things they made the people do? Ought they to? Yes, if they were right. If not, they should not have made the people do them. What terrible name did Jesus call them all? What is a hypocrite? Is a hypocrite, then, one of the wickedest of liars? What, then, will become of him, if he does not repent? (Rev. xxi. 8.)

—A lady who had been spending the summer at Lake Chautauqua says that on one of the steamers that passed Fair Point at the time when the great Sabbath-school convention was in progress, were three women, rather gaudily dressed, and wearing diamonds enough to indicate that they had plenty of money. Their conversation was carried on in a loud voice, and attracted considerable attention. In front of Fair Point stands a statue of Faith. "See that piece of statuary," said number one. "I wonder who it is. It must be Jupiter." "No," said number two, "it looks more like Venus." "Well," said number three, "anyway it's one of those people in the Bible."—*Troy Times.*