Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FIRST QUARTER.

ISRAEL AFTER THE CAPTIVITY.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Select Notes.)

Lesson X. March 5. Neh. 13: 15-22.

KEEPING THE SABBATH.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy."—Ex. 20: 8.

EXPLANATORY.

15. SABBATH BREAKING. *In those days.* After his return, and while he was making his other reforms. *In Judah.* In the country around Jerusalem, where the manufacture of wine and other agricultural processes would be going on. *Treading winepresses.* The winepress was a large vat (an ordinary size probably was eight feet square, and somewhat over a foot deep) into which the grapes were thrown and trodden by feet of men (see Isa. 63: 3), and the juice flowed through an aperture into a lower, smaller vat, whence it was collected in vessels; the vats were frequently cut in the solid rock, and a winepress often gave the name to a locality. *On the Sabbath.* Expressly contrary to the Fourth Commandment. Probably the desecration of the Sabbath had been greatly increased during the captivity, where, under foreign masters who had no Sabbath, the people were compelled to work on all days of the week, and where the whole trend of fashion and of social usage tended to obliterate Sabbath keeping in the few poor foreigners, as the tides of the Bay of Fundy sweep away the little streams on the low-tide sands. *And bringing in sheaves.* In the East the farmers all live in villages and towns, and *go forth* to cultivate the surrounding country. It is not unusual, therefore, for them to bring their harvest home to thresh it. The farmers brought their grain within the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Nehemiah, to secure it against robbers, for the country was then in an unsettled and unsafe condition. *Wine, grapes and figs.* For storage and sale. This required a large working force, and tempted the people to buy and trade on the Sabbath. The people believed that what was done on the Sabbath was so much clear gain, and did not see that as much would have been sold on six days as on seven. Indeed, all Sabbath work is done at a loss.

16. *There dwelt men of Tyre also therein.* That is, in the city, Jerusalem. Devoted to commerce, they had formed a little settlement in Judea for the sale of their merchandise, *fish* (they were a maritime people) and other things. Tyre and Zidon were the two great cities on the coast of Phœnicia, northwest from Jerusalem.

SABBATH REFORM. 17. *I contended.* Argued and used his official authority. *With the nobles.* The higher classes, the people of prominence and influence, who were the most to blame, since they had better knowledge, and fuller control of their time, and who would have the most influence in favoring or opposing the reform. *What evil thing is this?* They knew as well as he that their profaning the Sabbath was an evil thing, drowning its still, small voice with open theatres, riding over it with cars and carriages, sailing over it in steamboats and yachts.

18. *Did not your fathers thus?* Why was Jerusalem destroyed? Where had the nation been carried into captivity? Why were they now weak, and poor, and scattered? Let the prophets answer. One reason was that their fathers refused to obey God's Sabbath laws. A broken Sabbath, was the answer (Jer. 17: 27; Ezek. 20: 13. See also Isa. 58: 13, 14). In these passages of the prophets, and throughout the Old Testament, the Sabbath observance is to be regarded as a representative idea, a central duty around which grouped themselves, and to which attached themselves, all other duties. The dedication of one day in the week to God gave firmness to the framework on which the religious life was built, particularly by giving time for special service and meditation on the law, and the formation of godly habits of life.

19. *Began to be dark before the Sabbath.* At sunset of the previous day, because their Sabbath began then. *The gates should be shut* as usual, only they were *not opened till after the Sabbath. My servants set I at the gates.* His own armed bodyguard, whom he could trust.

20. *So the merchants.* Not believing that the command would be strictly enforced. *Lodged.* Camped outside the walls, waiting for the gates to be opened on Sabbath morning as formerly.

21. *I testified against him.* Rebuking, commanding.

22. *I commanded the Levites.* The Levites would be more appropriate keepers of the city gates on the Sabbath day than his servants, for whom he, no doubt, had other uses. The Levites were therefore ordered to *cleanse themselves*, that is, to purify themselves from ceremonial uncleanness, and come and attend to guarding the gates on the Sabbath day as a religious duty, as indeed it was; for it was to sanctify the Sabbath day, to keep it sacred, to save it from violation and profanation by the trafficking of the people.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER. This prayer for remembrance is repeated several times, each time after some hard-fought battle. Nehemiah had made many enemies by his course. Men cursed him; he would look for his blessings from God.

THE SABBATH OF TO-DAY. *First.* The command to keep the Sabbath is written by God's own hand (1) in the law of God, and (2) in the nature of man, and written in the law because it is written in nature. It is not a Jewish law, but "was made for man," for all men. Not one word of it can be changed without injury. There are not a few Jewish interpretations that should be swept away as cobwebs from our ceilings, or dust from our floors, but the commandment itself stands as it was written by God. Jesus Christ in no way abolished the Sabbath law. He only interpreted it, and rescued it from Pharaaic tradition and slavery. It is the very height of absurdity to suppose that He would abolish a law absolutely necessary to the best welfare of man, and put nothing better in its place.

Second. The fourth commandment enforces the Christian Sabbath, for Sunday is just as really the seventh day and the *Sabbath* day as is the Saturday Sabbath of the Jews. All the difference lies in beginning the count from a different point. Bush well says: "All that the commandment expressly requires is, to observe a day of sacred rest after every six days of labor. The seventh day, indeed, is to be kept holy, but not a word is here said as to the point from which the reckoning is to begin. The 'seventh day' is not so much the seventh according to any particular method of computing the septenary cycle, as in reference to the six working days before mentioned; every seventh day in rotation after six of labor. The Jewish Sabbath was kept on our Saturday, but we act equally in accordance with the spirit and the letter of this commandment by keeping it on Sunday; and as this was the day on which our Lord arose from the dead, it has come to be appropriately designated as 'the Lord's day,' and as such has been observed as the Christian Sabbath from the earliest periods of the church.

Third. The Sabbath is necessary for the best good of man. (1) Because man needs it to care for his spiritual nature, to lift his soul up into the higher realms, to prepare for immortal life. (2) Because man needs it as a day for moral training and instruction; a day for teaching men about their duties, for looking at life from a moral standpoint. (3) It is of great value as a means of improving the mind. (4) Man needs rest for his whole system. A day of rest is needful for the body, as well as the soul. The workingmen need the Sabbath rest to give them freedom and enlargement.

He Took It Literally.

The *Religious Telescope* relates the following:

When Uncle Isaac Kretsinger, now a superannuated United Brethren preacher of Latham, Ill., was a pioneer itinerant in the wilds of Ohio, having preached at a certain place one Sunday morning, he was kindly invited by a well-to-do settler, who was a member of no church, to go home with him for dinner. The invitation was gladly accepted, and on entering the house the generous host said, "Now, Mr. Kretsinger, 'please do not consider yourself as company, but one of the family.' Make yourself perfectly at home, and do just as if you were in your own house. But please excuse me till I put up the horses." "All right, all right; thank you, thank you," replied Uncle Isaac in his curt, appreciative manner. When left alone, he soon noticed a suspicious-looking barrel set up on blocks in a corner of the room, with a faucet in one end. He at once began to investigate, and found that it was about half filled with whiskey. With his pronounced anti-whiskey convictions, this was a thing that could not be tolerated for a moment in his own house; and as he was requested and authorized to do here exactly as he would do in his own house, his line of action was plain. He immediately doffed his coat, took hold of the barrel, moved it off the blocks, and rolled it to the door. Just as he was about to tumble it into the yard, his host put in an appearance, when the following dialogue ensued:

HOST (much excited)—"Why, Mr. Kretsinger, Mr. Kretsinger, what are you doing?"

Kretsinger (cool and deliberate)—"I am rolling this barrel of whiskey out of the house."

H.—"Why, why, what do you mean?"

K.—"Why, sir, you very kindly requested me to make myself perfectly at home in your house, and do exactly here as I would do in my own home. Therefore I soon discovered this barrel of whiskey in the corner yonder; and as I am especially commissioned of God to fight the devil, I could not for a moment permit a thing that has as much devil in it as this whiskey has to remain in my house, so I proceeded at once to roll it out."

H.—"Well, well, Mr. Kretsinger, I am beat; and I do admire your candor and bravery. But please let it remain in my house, and I solemnly promise you when what is in the barrel is disposed of, no more whiskey shall come into my house."

K.—"All right, sir. I believe you are an honorable man and will be true to your promise; so I accept the conditions."

With that the two men placed the barrel back in the corner; the whiskey evil was talked over in a friendly way; the man kept his promise, and ever after there was no warmer friend or greater admirer of Uncle Isaac Kretsinger in all that part of the new West.

— Nothing that God has made is to be despised; least of all this body that now holds us. It has in it all the wonder and glory of creation, and is an epitome of all previous creations—a harp of more than a thousand strings; so strong that it can level mountains; so fine that in its automatic skill it almost thinks; so nearly spiritual that we cannot see where sense joins thought; so coarsely material that chemical law runs riot in it; a mere forge for the fire of oxygen, yet so delicate that it reflects in every turn and gesture the spirit and temper of the mind; so one with us that if it is sound we can hardly fail of being happy, and if it is weak we can hardly fail of being miserable; so one with us that we cannot think of ourselves as separate from it, yet are conscious that it is no part of us—such a thing as this is not to be despised or treated otherwise than as sacred. We have hardly any more imperative work than to secure for the body its highest possible vigor and health. How to feed and clothe and house it; how to use it; how to keep it safe from weakening and poisoning gases; how to secure that rhythmic action of its functions that turns physical existence into music—this is the immediate question before civilization, the discussion of which will drive out much of the vice of society and revolutionize its systems of education. The gospel of the body is yet to be heard and heeded.—*Theodore T. Munger, D. D.*

— B. B. B. cured Mrs. B. Maddis, of Mt. Pleasant, Ont., of painful sores which broke out on her left side.

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B. Y. P. U.

OUR OBJECT.

The unification of Baptist young people; their increased spirituality; their stimulation in Christian service; their edification in scriptural knowledge; their instruction in Baptist history and doctrine, through existing denominational institutions.

OUR FELLOWSHIP.

All Young People's Societies of whatsoever name in Baptist churches, and Baptist churches having no organizations are entitled to representation. We depend for our unity not upon any young people's name or method. Our common bond is in the New Testament, in the full affirmation of whose teachings

WE ARE ONE PEOPLE WITH OUR MISSION.

[Correspondents to this department should address their communications to J. H. MACDONALD, Amherst, N. S.]

Our Monthly Programme.

Our plan of work in St. Martins is proving so successful that I venture to state it in our young people's column with the hope that it will prove suggestive to other societies which may be in doubt as to the best monthly programme. Believing that all our young people should be engaged in some special evangelistic work, and that communities beyond easy walking distance from the church should in some way have a social meeting brought near to them, our Y. P. S. C. E., on one evening in the month, instead of meeting as a whole in the vestry, divides into three companies under competent leadership, and holds three cottage prayer meetings in as many different sections of the field. There is no part of our work more enjoyed, and no part has been so richly blessed.

Another of our regular sessions is given to Bible study. Four lessons in the life of Christ, as published in the *Young People's Union*, are considered on each of these occasions, the pastor giving a brief *resume* of them, and then questioning. A number of our young people met at the pastor's, on the evening of Jan. 31st, and were given a test examination on the first fifteen lessons. The result was most gratifying, the highest mark being 99, the lowest 60.

We find that a young people's prayer meeting is a necessity. It furnishes the best opportunity of directing the first public efforts of our young people in prayer and testimony, and also brings home most directly the *duty* of regular prayer meeting participation. But we find that for all this one such meeting a month, in addition to our cottage meeting, avails. (On this evening we hear from and pray for our different cottage meetings.)

The remaining Friday evening in the month is that of our church conference. We have our Christian Endeavor "roll call" fifteen minutes before conference, the members simply answering "Present," honoring their prayer meeting pledge *during the conference*. It will be seen at once that this throws the strength and inspiration of our "monthly consecration meeting" right into the conference. Such a plan we find much preferable to having three meetings conference week, since our young people of course attend the church prayer meeting as well as their own, and two evenings a week is all we believe to be, under ordinary circumstances, practicable.

When there is a fifth Friday, a social or a business meeting is always waiting for it.

Instead of a monthly "conquest meeting," our society takes possession of the regular church prayer meeting once in three months, and makes it a missionary evening, as to programme, following the suggestion for the conquest meeting given in the *Union*. The whole church thus shares the benefit, and our cottage meetings are not interfered with.

This then is our plan:

First Friday—"Roll call," immediately preceding conference.
Second Friday—Bible study.
Third Friday—Prayer meeting.
Fourth Friday—Three cottage prayer meetings.
Fifth Friday—Social or business meeting. C. W. W.

St. Martins, Feb. 11.

The Social Committee.

The social committee may give socials, socials very various and very wonderful, but their main duty is to cultivate sociability among the members at the ordinary meetings, to see that no one is allowed to make straight for the door without being spoken to, to be the hand-shake of the whole society, until the whole society becomes a hand-shake. Yet this is just the duty a social committee is most likely to neglect, and such neglect is all but fatal. A social once in three months will not make people sociable, if the ordinary meetings do not cause the most reserved and diffident to "feel at home." Let every meeting be characterized then by warmth of feeling and manner. C. W. W.

— Simple endurance, standing still under a load that is almost heavier than you can sustain—there is in that no flavor or suggestion of inspiration. Suffering does not nerve a man to endure suffering. There is in it no element of momentum. It reduces simply to a bare matter of staying power. As in the shipwreck described in the Acts, it becomes a question of casting out the anchors and simply waiting for the morning—*holding on* till daylight. St. Paul moved hither and thither through Asia and Europe in his magnificent missionary tours, and we presume that he was prayerful through them all and sought unto God for His wisdom and grace; but, being human, he was doubtless kept moving not only by the divine grace, but also by his own stimulated faculties of action, the vastness of his work and the novelties of the experience into which his enterprise ushered him. But the time when pre eminently we do find St. Paul on his knees, seeking unto God in long and importunate prayer, was not when he had a great sermon to preach, or a long epistle to write, or a great journey to make, but when he had a little miserable, pricking, stinging thorn in the flesh to bear. There was nothing that could exactly be called exhilarating in that. It cut into the nerve, but could hardly be said to make nerve.—*Rev. C. H. Parkhurst, D. D.*

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My Friend's Experience.

In a confidential talk with an intimate friend not long ago, the subject of trust was most prominent, and in the course of our conversation my friend told me this bit of her own experience in the matter. I give it with her consent and as nearly as possible in her own words, hoping that it may be as helpful to others as it has been to me. I ask only that each reader regard it as an experience, and not at all as an attempt at exegesis, commentation, or doctrinal teaching.

"You know that in our Sunday-school class we are encouraged to ask questions which are hard for us to answer or which it will be helpful for us all to discuss and consider. Well, one Saturday this one was proposed: 'Do you think it is possible for any one really to want to do and bear God's will and yet be afraid of it, shrink from the suffering and self-denial which it involves?' I lost the answer, for the question set me thinking at once. I wanted God's will to be done in me, and yet I was afraid to trust myself wholly to Him, fearing the consequences of such complete self-surrender, and thinking with a troubled and anxious heart of the sorrow and suffering which would be necessary to make me a thoroughly obedient child.

"That question haunted me so that at last I made up my mind to consider it and answer it squarely. The first thing was to find out what it meant; so I took up my dictionary, found 'will,' and read: 'the choice or determination of one in authority, a decree, a command.' That was no help, it only made me rebellious; but I bethought myself of my Greek Testament. On looking up 'will' there and in the Greek Lexicon I discovered that the verb from which it was derived meant 'to wish or be fain with an idea of purpose or design,' and that the word itself was sometimes translated 'pleasure.' That definition brought me a grain of comfort.

"Then I began studying my Bible, looking up 'will' in the concordance and comparing passages and references with an ever increasing interest. I felt so rebuked when I read in Ephesians: 'Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is,' that I resolved at once that I would understand it if I possibly could.

"At first I was most impressed with two verses in Thessalonians which seemed to be definitions, just exactly what I wanted: 'In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you;' and 'This is the will of the Lord, even your sanctification.' I remember thinking, if I am to give thanks in everything, everything must be for my good, for God would not bid me be thankful for what would harm me; and besides, my sanctification is the will of God—He wishes me to be made holy; then all that comes to me comes for that purpose, and if I want to be holy I must accept everything thankfully. But that seemed so very hard as to be almost impossible until I began to notice how Paul regarded God's will, writing of it so lovingly, calling it good, and making all his plans subject to it.

"The more I studied the matter the more I became inclined to believe that Paul was right. There were Christ's words about it which I must believe, and Paul's and Peter's and John's—how could I doubt any more? Salvation, sanctification—they could not be the will of one who was either carelessly or purposely unkind and cruel, I thought, and then my mind recalled John's words, 'God is love.' For a whole day that sentence repeated itself in my thoughts, till I began to realize it somewhat, and that night when I opened my Bible to Romans and read the first verses of the twelfth chapter, the meaning of those familiar words dawned on me—that I was to test and find out for myself, by my own experience, that God's will is 'good and acceptable and perfect.' And at the very moment when I determined to test it, I lost all my fear of the results of complete self-surrender, and realized a little of its restfulness and joy.

"There is one thing more about the matter that I want to tell you, though you may think it very strange. I mean the luxury of being miserable. I am ashamed to speak of it, but I always used to think over the bitterness of giving up my own will, and could never see that, after I had given it up, I ought to leave it entirely, and be happy in submitting. I was constantly going over my grievances, and sometimes made myself perfectly miserable by recalling the many times my wishes had been thwarted and my plans upset. And, do you know, that was actually the hardest thing to give up when I decided to prove God's will, for I really liked to be miserable in that way. But now I feel so sure that God is love, I believe so fully that His will is my salvation and my sanctification, that I have given Him myself and everything I have, to do with as He pleases. I don't worry any more about the trials and sorrows that are ahead of me, nor trouble myself over those that are past. And I feel very much safer and happier than ever before.

"So my answer to that question is: Find out what the will of God actually means, and then see if you can any longer be afraid of submitting to it wholly."—*Zion's Herald.*

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