

The Sabbath School.

LESSONS FOR DECEMBER.

FIRST SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*Jesus and Mary*, John 20 : 11-18. Golden Text, Mark 16: 9. Par. passages, Matthew 28 : Luke 8 : 2.

Mary Magdalene derives her name from her birth-place, Magdala, a town of Galilee, near to Capernaum. The word *seven* is sometimes used in Scripture for a great or indefinite number; and indicates that she was grievously tormented by evil spirits. She is sometimes supposed to be the same as the woman mentioned, Luke 7, 37, who was a person of abandoned character; but for this opinion there is no good foundation.

Of all the followers of the Saviour, Mary seems to have been most distinguished for love and faithfulness. She and her female companions were last at the cross and first at the sepulchre; and when Peter and John, to whom she had brought the startling news that the tomb of Jesus was empty, had come, and seen, and returned to their homes, she could not tear herself away, but remained weeping for her lost Saviour. Stooping, and looking into the tomb, she saw two angels, in white garments, of dazzling brightness, as we may infer from what is said of the angels who rolled away the stone. They sat, one at the head, the other at the foot, in reverent contemplation of the spot in which the body of their Lord and ours had lain. As they waited, the folding of the grave clothes had perhaps been their work. So intense and absorbing was Mary's grief, that she had no room for astonishment or alarm, but replied to their questions as if it had been asked by an ordinary friend. As she turned, she saw Jesus Himself, but, blinded by her tears, and by the darkness of the early dawn, and perhaps from some change in His appearance after His resurrection, she knew Him not. Her answer to His question, why she wept, indicates the sublime affection which filled her heart. Her feeble strength would scarcely avail to take Him away, but she thinks herself fit for anything if she can obtain possession of the beloved object. It is remarkable that Jesus did not first appear to any of His Apostles, but to a woman, and that that woman was not His mother. How does this fact condemn the idolatrous reverence which Romanists pay to the Virgin Mary.

The sound of her own name, pronounced in the ordinary tones of the "voice of the beloved," Song 2, 8, revealed to her the presence of her Saviour. Turning, she would have clasped His feet, as the other women, from whom she had parted when she went to call Peter and John, subsequently did. Commentators differ as to the reason why she was forbidden, while they were permitted to touch Him. Might it not be, that

having given her a message to His Apostles which would dispel the sorrow into which His death had plunged them; and fill them with joy, His loving heart would brook no delay; and he dispatched her at once, telling her that as He had not yet ascended, she would have better opportunities to show her affection.

The commission and His message are brief, but very wonderful. The first is, "Go to my brethren." He is not ashamed to call them brethren, but we do not read of any one who presumed to call Him "brother." First He called them *servants*, John 12, 26, then *disciples*, John 15, 8, next *friends*, John 15, 15. Now He calls them brethren. And yet all these brethren had but just forsaken Him. How undeserved and immeasurable is this condescension. But the message implies His infinite dignity. He says, "My Father and your Father," not *our* Father—"My God and your God," not *our* God. God was His Father essentially—ours not so; *our* God essentially—His not so. His God only in connection with us—our God only in connection with Him (Brown's Com. on John).

SECOND SABBATH.

SUBJECT:—*Jesus and Thomas*, John 20: 24-31.

The Resurrection of Christ was an event so important that it had to be confirmed by the very strongest evidence. Such evidence Christ furnished His disciples during the forty days that elapsed between the Resurrection and the Ascension, so that every shadow of doubt was removed. He appeared to them time and again, talked with them, ate before them, &c. The reluctance of the disciples to accept the testimony from heresy and their demand to see for themselves have been overruled for good. This was especially so in the case of Thomas. He was unreasonable in rejecting the testimony of his fellow disciples, and in refusing to believe unless he not only should see Christ, but should see and feel the scars of the nails and spear. Yet this unbelief has accomplished good. If Thomas was convinced, none now can doubt.

V. 24.—This appearance of Christ was on the evening of the first day of the week—the Christian Sabbath. (See v. 19.) Why Thomas was absent we know not. Some think it was through sullen despondency. The fact of the absence is stated "as a loving apology" for his slowness of belief." He missed much however by that absence. Let us learn to prize every opportunity of getting spiritual benefit.

V. 25.—Thomas's language is very strong. He does not say, *If I see I will believe*; but, *I will not believe unless I see*. This disciple was inclined to look at the dark side. (See 11 ch., 16 v.)

V. 26, 27.—*After eight days, i. e., on the eighth day, the second Sabbath of the New Dispensation.* By Christ's thus appearing again on the recurrence of His Resurrection Day, He would give it a special sanctity.