



LESSON II.—OCTOBER 14, 1906.

The Ten Virgins.

Matt. xxv., 1-13.

Golden Text.

Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh.—Matt. xxv., 13.

Home Readings.

Monday, October 8.—Matt. xxv., 1-13.

Tuesday, October 9.—Matt. xxiv., 1-14.

Wednesday, October 10.—Matt. xxiv., 42-51.

Thursday, October 11.—I. Thess. v., 1-13.

Friday, October 12.—Luke xii., 35-48.

Saturday, October 13.—Luke xiii., 23-30.

Sunday, October 14.—Mark xiii., 24-37.

(By Davis W. Clark)

Late, late, so late! and dark the night, and chill!

Late, late, so late! but we can enter still.
'Too late, too late! ye can not enter now!'

No light had we:—for that we do repent,
And learning this, the Bridegroom will relent,

'Too late, too late! ye can not enter now!'

No light! so dark and dark and chill the night—
O let us in, though late, to kiss His feet.

'Too late, too late! ye can not enter now!'

Have we not heard the Bridegroom is so sweet!

O let us in, though late, to kiss His feet,
'No! no! too late! ye can not enter now!'
—Alfred Tennyson: Idylls of the King.

This parable fairly teems with Oriental incident and coloring. It has been called beautiful, simple, rich in instruction, and fullest in many-sided meaning. It is one of several touching the consummation of the kingdom of God.

There were ten virgins. The number suggests wholeness or entirety, ten being the all-comprehending number. The virgins were alike in that they all had lamps. They all wanted to meet the Bridegroom. They all slept. But the things in which they agreed were mere accidents. The thing in which they differed was the essential. Five (the number is not significant, certainly not of the proportion of those who are elect) had oil with which to make the festive illumination. The other five were vain and thoughtless, looking only at appearances, personally unready, and vainly expecting to have their lamps filled on a sudden from the common store.

The wise could afford to nod (literally) and sleep. They were furnished. But the foolish only gave further illustration of their inveterate folly. Time they spent in sleep might better have been employed in seeking the needed store.

There is a true touch of Orientalism in the suddenness of the Bridegroom's arrival. The time could not be scheduled, as upon a modern railway time-card. . . . The dialogue between the wise and foolish is pathetic. 'Give us!' is the futile plea of folly. 'Not so!' is the strong repellent negative of wisdom. There is really no severity, much less irony, in the reply and accompanying advice.

The fate of the foolish, on the face of it, seems remediless. The time when they could have gotten the oil was past. They were late in troubling themselves. The time when the illumination was needed was over. The bridal party was already in the brilliancy of the banquet-hall, and the door

was shut. How could the Bridegroom recognize those who had not been of the company to bid Him welcome and lead Him to His bride?

So much for the pictorial side of the parable. In its spiritual application the minutia count for little, and one needs to be on guard against excessive allegorizing. In a general way it may be said that the ten represent the whole visible Church, part of which to this day has the form only (creed and sacrament)—the lightless lamp of a mere ecclesiastical confession. The other part has the lamp of Churchly form, filled with the 'eternal substance of the Spirit of Christ.' There is a continuous, deadly antithesis: Wheat and tares; true and false; dead and living; wise and foolish. But the external similarity is so great that we are cautioned against judging and dividing.

In the ultimate analysis it is reduced to a personal matter. Each virgin brought her own lamp. None can stand for another. Holiness of another can not avail for us. The Lord's arrival is the testing-time, discovering to all alike whether in the lamp of profession there is the oil of reality or not. It is the dividing time as well. Each is on the side of the door for which he has prepared himself. There is no favoritism. Orthodoxy has long maintained that the door never will be opened to the foolish; once excluded—that the decrees of judgment are eternally irreversible. It must be acknowledged that this cruel creed is voiced in gentler terms than ever before, and that there are not wanting those of untainted orthodoxy who deny it. As between conditional immortality or future probation as means of relief, the latter is to be preferred; and Canon Farrar's followers in the 'larger hope' increase.

KEY AND ANALYSIS.

I. A parable on the consummation of the kingdom of heaven. Literary and Oriental characteristics of the parable.

II. Particular meaning.

- (1) Ten virgins represent whole visible Church. Divided into two classes. Wise had form and spirit. Foolish had form only.
- (2) Lord's second and sudden advent. Test of character: the day declares it.
- (3) Personal element in religion emphasized. Each for himself; no possibility of interchange of spiritual life.
- (4) The irreparable loss of the 'foolish' questioned in current theology.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

No parable sets forth more lucidly the probationary character of the present life.

Analogies abound. As childhood stands related to maturity, apprenticeship to trade, studentship to profession, so the whole present life stands related to the life to come.

Stands categorically: As fractional periods of life stand related to the whole life, so the whole life in this world stands related to the eternal life in the unseen world.

There is philosophy as well as poetry in the lines of Alice Cary.

'The hues that our to-morrows wear
Are by our yesterday's forecast.
Our future takes into itself
The true impressions of our past;

and of George Eliot:

'Our deeds still travel with us from afar,
And what we have been makes us what we are.'

Robin Fitzpatrick was a local celebrity in Highland County, Ohio, fifty years ago. Rising one right, he witnessed a magnificent meteoric display. In an ecstasy he cried to his wife: 'Betsy, get up! The Lord has come!' and remembering his friend, he said: 'Neighbor Hott, don't you know the Lord has come. I'll run over and tell him.' Neighbor Hott was found in hiding. Not being so well prepared for the Lord's coming as Robin, he had crawled under his bed.

Argos lost his head when he closed the

last of fifty pairs of eyes. While Ulysses slept, his sailors loosed the baleful winds of Aeolus. So the classics are woven and interwoven with legends strikingly illustrating the necessity of eternal vigilance. It remains, however, for the Divine Teacher, divesting the subject of quaint fiction, to define the ethical principles involved, and ground the necessity upon a moral basis.

The spirit of true Christian watchfulness is sometimes lost in the mazes of arithmetical calculations of the date of the second coming of Jesus. He watches best who serves most diligently.

The strong impression made by the Lord's teaching is apparent even in the favorite names given by early Christian parents: Gregory the Greek, Vigilantius the Latin word for watchfulness.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, October 14.—Topic—Who are foolish, and who are wise? Matt. xxv., 1-13.

Junior C. E. Topic.

A LETTER AND A PRAYER.

Monday, October 8.—Hezekiah the good king. II. Kings xviii., 1-7.

Tuesday, October 9.—The king of Assyria. II. Kings xviii., 17, 18.

Wednesday, October 10.—Rabshakeh's message. II. Kings xviii., 19-25.

Thursday, October 11.—Isaiah's message. II. Kings xix., 1-7.

Friday, October 12.—Rabshakeh's letter. II. Kings xix., 8-13.

Saturday, October 13.—The prayer heard. II. Kings xix., 20.

Sunday, October 14.—Topic—A letter, a prayer, an answer. II. Kings xix., 14-19; 32-34.

Why Do We Hesitate?

A strange reluctance comes over many when they try to talk about the soul and its relation to God. It is felt alike by the converted and unconverted persons. Very often the gay girl whose heart is running over with fun and mirth and whose speech sparkles with wit and humor, has deep in her consciousness the feeling that she is unsatisfied, that she wants something better, purer and higher. She wishes that the Christian woman who is talking with her would ask her a question, would give her a hint, would lead the conversation to the subject of personal religion. The other has no thought of the kind. She has even a faint, undefinable dread that any effort on her part would be received coldly, or made occasion of ridicule.

So the opportunity passes. The souls have been within speaking distance, but have failed to communicate with each other. Each goes on its way. The friend of Christ who might have won a soul to him, has been silent, afraid, ashamed. What wonder if to that too faithless friend there comes the sad experience that the Beloved has withdrawn himself and is gone; that, seeking the Spirit, finds him not, and calling, there returns no answer! Can there be perfect serenity and the full sense of communion with God to one who refuses or neglects so important a duty?—Margaret E. Sangster.

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