

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XLII.

THE PRODIGAL SON.

Oct. 20, } Luke xv. 11-24.
1878. }

GOLDEN TEXT.—“I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me.”—Ps. xl. 17.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Luke xiv. 25-35 Forsaking all for Christ.
T. Luke xv. 1-10 Joy in heaven.
W. Luke xv. 11-24 The Prodigal Son.
Th. Luke xv. 25-32 The Elder Son.
F. Ps. xl. 1-17 The Helper of the needy.
S. Eph. ii. 1-22 The far-off made near.
S. Ps. ciii. 1-22 The pitying Father.

HELPS TO STUDY.

The Pharisees had unwittingly become preachers of the Glad Tidings. Filled with indignation because they saw those whom they had cast out gathered around Jesus, whose compassionate love had drawn them to Himself, they murmured—**This man receiveth sinners.** Jesus makes the word of their self-righteous blindness and jealousy the text of a gracious discourse, in which He repeats and illustrates the truth which they had ignorantly spoken.

Of the three parables contained in this chapter, the first two form a pair, presenting the same idea under two different aspects. The grand thought common to both is the *grace* of God, His solicitude and love for the sinner. The difference is this: The first under the figure of a lost sheep represents the sinner in his *misery*, the object of the divine compassion; the second under the figure of a lost coin represents the sinner as one *precious* to God. It brings into prominence this idea of the value which God attaches to a lost soul.

But the third parable rises far above these. It also brings before us the sinner both as a wretched being and a being unspeakably precious to God. But it is no longer a lost sheep; or a lost coin, but a lost son.

But it goes even beyond this. For it discloses the workings of a sinner's own heart, the self-will and misery of his sin, the contrition and the joy of his penitence and recovery. While in its latter portions it returns to the point from which the discourse of Jesus started, and in the elder brother sets before the Pharisees the image of their own discontent and self-righteousness. It is with the description of the younger son that our lesson has chiefly to do. The parable describes his wandering and his return. But in each of these there are two stages. So that in all there are set before us four phases in the repentant prodigal's life, his *sin*, his *misery*, his *conversion*, and his *restoration*.

I. **SIN—vers. 11-13.** The prodigal had evidently a kind father and a happy home. But he is discontented. He wanted his own way. His father's presence has become a restraint to him. Besides, the untrod world without attracts him. It is the old longing for the tree whose fruit seemed pleasant to look upon, and the desire to “be as gods”—Gen. iii. 5. It is thus that the sinner turns to his own way—Isa. liii. 6—and deceives himself with the expectation of an unreal liberty, which proves the bitterest bondage.

It is in this spirit that the prodigal demands “the portion of goods that falleth to him.” This would be one-half of what the elder brother would receive—Deut. xxi. 17. He wanted his father's possessions, but not his father's presence and love. So we prefer the creature to the Creator: snatch at the gifts, while we forget or despise the giver. Self-will and selfishness—these are the sources of all sin. How desirable, we think, it is to have our own way, to please ourselves. But Christ “pleased not Himself.” He “came not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him.”

Then, as the prodigal went into a far country, and as Adam hid himself from God, we try to get as far away from Him as we can. God is not in all the thoughts of the sinner.

There he wasted his substance with riotous living. The sinner is a great waster. He squanders away all God's gifts, abuses all that is entrusted to him. He is a spendthrift. Even where he does not plunge into gross sensuality, in the midst of more refined selfishness, he is a spiritual bankrupt.

But in this, and every case, sooner or later sin is followed by

II. **MISERY—verses 14-16.** The coveted liberty of self-enjoyment soon finds its limits. These limits are twofold. The first arises within the prodigal himself. **He had spent all.** His resources are exhausted. He is satiated. This feeling of satiety, disappointment and remorse, may arise even while outward circumstances are still favorable. But it will be hastened and intensified when troubles and calamities overtake the transgressor. So it was with him in the parable. There arose a mighty famine. “The two causes of misery coincide, and wretchedness is at its height.” But his pride is still unsubdued. He still has confidence in his own resources—Isa. ix. 10; Jer. v. 3; Isa. lviii. 10. He joins himself to a citizen of the far country. This represents a deeper plunge into sin. He sells himself to the world. He has no pleasure in sin; but he goes on sinning. He cannot break off. He has become a slave to it—John viii. 34; 2 Pet. ii. 19. Observe the extremity of his wretchedness as set forth in the parable. To serve a foreigner and to feed swine, was a double degradation to a Jew. He even craved the swine's food, so great was his destitution. **But the husks (Note 1) cannot satisfy him.** Yet he had been compelled to turn to these, for of nobler food no man gave unto him. Such are the tender mercies of the wicked. Even his boon companions forsake the sinner. The world tramples on him in his misery, who once served it.

Thus we have followed the prodigal in a way that has been leading him farther and farther from God. But God has not

forgotten. What seemed the expression of the divine anger proves to be divine mercy. God hedged up his way with thorns that he may not pursue it to his own destruction—Hos. ii. 6. He has made his sin bitter to him that he may forsake it. We have now reached the turning-point.

III. **CONVERSION—verses 17-20.** The wanderer came to himself. It is the first moment of self-recollection, after a life of dissipation. The sinner is beside himself. Madness is in his heart—Eccles. ix. 3. Only when man turns to God does he find his true self. He compares himself with the hired servants. These have enough, while the son is starving. This may refer to the happiness and peace he sees in nature, or, perhaps, it is simply a general reference to God's providential care. He resolves to return to his Father. That he is his father he cannot forget. This draws him. He realizes the greatness of his offence. He has sinned against Heaven. Every sin is a sin against God—Ps. li. 4. He is humbled, feels his unworthiness. Then only does he become truly worthy. Willing now to take a servant's place, he will be a son indeed. He cares now more for his father's favor and love than for any place in his household. He is not going back for the sake of bread, or ambition. So he arose and came to his father. He carried out his resolution. Such is faith, an actual going to God. It is not merely desire, but that act which brings into contact the man in his guilt and need, and God in His forgiving mercy and the riches of His grace.

IV. **RESTORATION—verses 20-24.** How tender and gracious are these words of Jesus as He describes the reception of the prodigal. His father had been watching and longing for him; and now, when he was yet a great way off, he saw him and ran to meet him. God receives the penitent just as he is, and He not only forgives, He restores. The confession indeed is uttered, but it is interpreted. He cannot ask to be made as a hired servant; he has been received at once into all the privileges of sonship. The shoes, the signet ring, the long white robe (Note 2) were worn only by free men. The restoration is complete into all the privileges of a son. God hath not given to us the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, “Abba Father.” What joy there was in that household; joy for the prodigal's sake, for he has returned from his misery; joy for the father's sake, for the son whom he loved better than life, has returned. Such a reception awaits every penitent; such joy is awakened by the return of every sinner.

EXPLANATORY NOTES.

1. **Husks.**—The pods of the carob-tree (*Ceratonia siliqua*). “This tree is common in Syria; it produces long slender pods shaped like a horn or sickle, containing a sweetish pulp, and several brown shining seeds like beans. These pods are sometimes used as food by the poorer classes in the East, and swine are commonly fed with them.”—*Robinson*. “Horace alludes to living upon husks, as upon vile food”—Ep. II. i. 23). Pliny calls them the food of pigs (*N. H.* cxlii. 79). They are still used in Spain, etc., as food for cattle, and were often given to horses by British soldiers in the peninsular war. They are imported into Britain, and called locust-beans by the farmers.—*Biblical Museum*.

2. **The best robe.**—The original is emphatic, “a robe, the best one.” The garment was the upper garment worn by the higher classes among the Jews. It was not his old one, but a new one of honour. There may be an illusion to the robe of righteousness provided for us by Christ—Isa. lxi. 10; Rev. iii. 18. A ring; a seal ring, worn only by free men. Shoes. Slaves went barefoot. The sense of the whole verse is plain, even if we do not interpret each detail (the “ring,” the seal of the Spirit; the “shoes,” the preparation of the gospel of peace—Eph. vi. 15). When God receives and pardons, He does so fully; He gives the penitent all that can mark him as a son.

HEARING RESTORED.—Great invention by one who was deaf for 20 years. Send stamp for particulars. JNO GARMORE, Lock-box 905, Covington, Ky.

It is rough work that polishes. Look at the pebbles on the shore! Far inland, where some arm of the sea thrusts itself deep into the bosom of the land, and lies girdled by the mountains, sheltered from storms, the pebbles on the beach are rough, not beautiful. It is where long white lines of breakers roar, and the rattling shingle is rolled along the strand, that its pebbles are rounded and polished. As in nature, as in heart, so in grace. The more the diamond is cut, the brighter it sparkles; and in what seems hard dealing, their God has no end in view but to perfect his people.—*Dr. Guthrie*.

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY.

LINDSAY.—At Lindsay, on the last Tuesday of November.
LANARK AND RENFREW.—In St. Andrew's Church, Carleton Place, on November 19th, at 1 p.m.

QUEBEC.—In Melbourne, on Wednesday, 16th October, at 10 a.m.

SAUGEEN.—In Knox Church, Harrison, on Tuesday the 17th Dec., at 2 o'clock p.m.

TORONTO.—In the usual place, on the first Tuesday of November, at 11 a.m.

GUELPH.—In Knox Church, Guelph, on the third Tuesday of November, at 10 o'clock a.m.

BARRIE.—Next ordinary meeting at Barrie, Tuesday, 26th November, at 11 a.m. Adjourned meeting, to dispose of call from Knox Church, Oro, and of unfinished business, at Barrie, Tuesday, 15th Oct., at 11 a.m.

BRUCE.—In the Presbyterian Church, Port Elgin, on Tuesday, 17th December, at 2 o'clock p.m.

Births, Marriages and Deaths.

NOT EXCEEDING FOUR LINES 25 CENTS.

BIRTH.

On the morning of the 30th inst., at 527 Sherbourne St., the wife of D. Gunn, Esq., of a son.

WORDS OF THE WISE.

THERE are many men whose tongues might govern multitudes if they could govern their tongues.—*Prentice*.

AFFLICTION is the divine school of virtue; it corrects levity, interrupts the confidence of sinning, and softens and purifies the heart.—*Atterbury*.

THE body of our prayer is the sum of our duty; and as we must ask of God whatsoever we need, we must labor for all that we ask.—*Jeremy Taylor*.

In a watch, when we observe springs and wheels, great and small, each so fitted as to concur in an orderly motion, we acknowledge the skill of an artificer.

It is much easier to meet with error than to find truth; error is on the surface, truth is hidden in great depths; and the way to seek does not appear to all the world.—*Goethe*.

SUSTAIN and comfort yourself in the Lord; and be strong in His power if you are under the Lord's crosses, for you are in the beaten and common way to heaven!—*Rutherford*.

THE infinity of God is not mysterious, it is only unfathomable; not concealed, but incomprehensible. It is a clear infinity—the darkness of the pure, unsearchable sea.—*Ruskin*.

HE who learns and makes no use of his learning is a beast of burden, with a load of books. Comprehendeth the ass whether he carries on his back a library or a bundle of fagots?—*Saadi*.

I VENERATE old age; and I love not the man who can look without emotion upon the sunset of life, when the dusk of evening begins to gather over the watery eye, and the shadows of twilight grow broader and deeper upon the understanding.—*Longfellow*.

IT ought to be the great care of every one of us to follow the Lord fully. We must follow him universally, without dividing; uprightly, without dissembling; cheerfully, without disputing; constantly, without declining; and this is following him fully.—*M. Henry*.

THE British Empire has not been built up by conquest. It has grown by colonization and the accidents of colonization. It is no extravagant assertion that, if the resources of Great Britain, in men and money, had been devoted to purposes of conquest as the resources of France were devoted to conquest by Napoleon, we might have conquered the world.—*Christian World, London*.

Is there anything better than the tongue? Is it not the bond of society, the organ of truth, the expression of reason, the instrument of kindness to man, and of praise and adoration to God? Is there anything worse than the tongue? Is it not the instrument of strife, the means of contention, the source of division and wars, the organ of error, of lies, of calumny, of blasphemies?—*Aesop*.

GOD's treasury is absolutely inexhaustible. He can never fail a trusting heart. Let us remember this. God delights to be used. He never grows weary of ministering to the need of His people. If this were ever kept in the remembrance of the thoughts of our hearts, we should hear less of the accents of impatience and discontent, and more of the sweet language of thankfulness and praise.

ALMOST sweet is unsavory; almost hot is lukewarm. Almost a Christian is like the Ephraimites who could not pronounce Shibboleth but Sibboleth. Almost a Christian is like Ananias, who brought a part but left a part behind. Almost a Christian is like the virgins, who carried lamps without oil; like the willing-unwilling son, who said he would come, and would not.—*Henry Smith*.

DYING, yet giving life; nailed to the cross, yet holding the key of death and heaven; covered with every badge of contumely and scorn, yet crowning others with immortal diadems; robbed of all things, yet giving all His native right. No event of moral grandeur like this can ever be imagined. Truly Christ was the Wonderful, joining in His own person the strangest contrasts, the most inexplicable mysteries.

ABRAHAM really thought that his beloved Isaac must suffer, and was obliged to consent to it; but God would only have Isaac offered, and the ram burnt. And thus the Lord knows how to preserve that which is his own in you. Everything, however, must be offered up—life and health, body and soul, enjoyment, relish, gifts, and virtues, and even the darling image of holiness itself.—*Gerhard Tersteegen. 1720*.

As the tremulous needle, however easily it may be affected by foreign influences, never ceases to vibrate till it finds rest in the centre of attraction, so the sensitive soul of the Christian, too easily disturbed by external forces, finds no rest but in God. If for a moment the enemy is permitted to harass with accusations of guilt, in Him it finds pardon and peace. In weakness it turns to Him for strength; in darkness, for light; in trials, for direction. Under all circumstances, it never fails to find in God an all-sufficient, and sustaining portion.

BE TRUE.—Perhaps you are poor, but trying to seem rich; or with little culture, seeking to be thought learned; or being a “plain person,” impressive, or polished. Give over the effort. It is most wearisome. It gets you into many difficulties. It takes all ease out of your life. Be real. Have one aim, not two or three. Let your eye be single. Do not look one way and pull another, as rowers must do. Let your eyes look on. Live a simple, natural, true life, with one main purpose, “that men may glorify your Father which is in heaven.”—*Dr. John Hall*.

CHRISTIAN faith is, then, not only an assent to the whole Gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ, a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favor of God; and, in consequence thereof, a closing with him, and cleaving to Him, as our “Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption;” or in one word, our Salvation.—*Rev. John Wesley*.