

Dominion Churchman.

1st, 1876.

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THURSDAY, SEP. 7, 1876.

THIRTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY.

In the first lessons for the services of this Sunday, the 5th, 6th, and 7th Chapters of the second book of Kings, we have a rich collection of those graphic as well as instructive pictures of the life of the ancient world, for which the Old Testament Scriptures are so famous. In the fifth chapter is given the beautiful account of the way in which the little captive Jewess was instrumental in obtaining the cure of Naaman, captain of the Syrian host. The date given in the margin of our Bibles is B.C. 834, four or five years after the death of Ahab, and two or three years after the death of Ahaziah; the King of Israel at that time being Joram, brother of Ahaziah, and son of Ahab. Benhadad the 2nd, was King of Syria, and it was about this time that Homer and Hesiod are supposed to have lived. Three or four years before this occurred that remarkable rebellion of Mesha, King of Moab, against Israel, given in the third chapter, and which is referred to in the Archaic inscription on the celebrated *Moabite stone*, discovered in the land of Moab a few years ago. The King of Assyria at this time was named Vulmirari the 2nd.

Naaman, whose name means *pleasantness*, had attained a high position in the army of Benhadad. But he was a leper, a dire calamity, although it does not appear to have operated as a disqualification for public employment. The little Hebrew slave girl, by her kindly suggestion, showed that usefulness in the cause of religion is not confined to loftiness of station, or to maturity of years; but that the humblest position and the youngest disciple of the truth can promote the cause of God, and oftentimes, in a way that is denied to others. In consequence of the little girl's statement about the prophet Elisha, Benhadad gave Naaman a letter to his old enemy, King Joram; but as the letter merely stated that Naaman had been sent for him to cure, the King of Israel rent his clothes in astonishment and anger, suspecting that a quarrel was designed by this extraordinary proceeding. Elisha hearing of the circumstance, desired the stranger to be sent to him. Forthwith Naaman went, attended by a splendid retinue of horses, chariots, camels, and servants, which filled the open space in front of the prophet's house. Elisha took no further notice of all this show, than to send his servant and direct Naaman to wash in the Jordan seven times, which, so enraged him that he turned away in disgust. The Pharpar mentioned

by Naaman, runs into the Amana or Abana, now called El-Burada; the main stream flows through Damascus, and helps to give this city of gardens the most enchanted appearance. The appeal the servants made to Naaman is peculiarly touching, and full of meaning: "My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean?" His heart was subdued. He bent himself seven times beneath the waters of the sacred river, and rose from them free from all leprous stain. His gratitude led him to desire to worship the God of Israel, although the way in which he expressed his intention showed that the notions he entertained of the duties of that worship were exceedingly imperfect. The punishment of Gehazi for his worldliness on an occasion which might have led him to exert himself more purely for the honor of his God, was a just retribution for his selfishness and lying.

The King of Syria appears to have shown very little gratitude for the benefit done to the chief captain of his army by the prophet Elisha, for he was soon again in the field warring against Israel. And even after a great part of the Syrian army was at the mercy of Israel, and was allowed to depart unhurt, and fed at the request of the prophet, Benhadad continued his incursions in the land; and at last gathered all the host of his troops together, and so effectually besieged Samaria as to cause a great famine in the city. The wonderful deliverance announced to the besieged by four leprous men who went out to the camp of the Syrians in order to avoid starvation, and found no men there, but a great stock of provisions, furnishes a number of lessons of the most striking character for our edification, among which may be particularly mentioned, the remark of the lepers:—"We do not well. This day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace." Another remarkable circumstance mentioned is the condign punishment of the lord on whose hand the King leaned, for his contemptuous unbelief when the prophet had announced the deliverance of the city from famine just a day before it came to pass in so miraculous a manner.

THE COLLECT, like so many others—each in its own peculiar way—teaches the necessity of good works, here called *faithfully serving God in this life*, and *doing true and laudable service*; at the same time that this service is the gift of God alone, in full agreement with St. Paul's words, 1 Cor. iv. 7:—"Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" There are also unequivocally taught in this collect, the doctrine that it is possible to receive

the gift from God of performing in this life, service which is worthy of being characterized as "true and laudable;" that the attainment of the heavenly promises, will be the result of faithful service; and that if faithful, or true and laudable service be neglected in life, we may certainly expect to fail in the realization of those heavenly promises hereafter.

THE EPISTLE, from Gal. iii. 16, etc., shows the connection of the faith of Christ with the promise made to Abraham, and the subserviency of the law to the system propounded to him, which was fulfilled in Christ; and its consequent temporary character. In order to understand the Apostle's meaning, and to appreciate the force and beauty of his reasoning, we must bear in mind that by the faith of Jesus Christ," St. Paul does not merely mean the exercise of faith in Christ as an act of reliance, and nothing further, as some seem to imagine. The expression includes the whole of the Christian system, of which, faith as a simple exercise of an act of reliance on Christ is a part, and only an elementary part.

IN THE GOSPEL, the superiority of the Christian dispensation is again brought forward; and is confirmed by the desire which prophets and kings of a former dispensation entertained to view its manifold blessings more closely and more completely than the glimmering light of former revelations allowed them. Christ's assertion to this effect afforded a certain lawyer an opportunity of trying Him, by asking how eternal life was to be obtained. The lawyer probably had no malicious intention, he would fain make proof of the skill of this famous Galilean teacher, he would measure His depths, and for this purpose, rather than from a pure love of the truth and a desire to be instructed in it, he brought forward the most weighty question a man could ask. Our Lord's reply indicates that the question has already been answered; and the lawyer's quotation of the two passages our Lord had Himself referred to, showed that he was in advance of most of his countrymen; he quotes very properly Deut vii. 5, in connection with Lev. xix. 18, as embodying the essence of the law. Thereupon, the Lord bears his testimony that he had answered well. Let this be put into practice and all will be well. These words appear to have touched the lawyer's conscience, for he doubtless felt he had not been living in obedience to the law of love. He would however justify himself if possible; and as he is to love his neighbor, he asks: Who is my neighbor? This had been a disputed point among them. They all agreed that the Gentile was not the neighbor referred to, nor was the Samaritan the neighbor. These were settled decisions with the Jews. The Lord however determined the question