

The Flag at Half-Mast.*

BY SENATOR MACDONALD.

WHY flies the flag at half-mast
Which was masthead yesterday?
Has one of the mighty fallen—
Some great one passed away?

Has the rider on the pale horse—
The rider with icy wand,
Touched beating heart and stilled it,
Of some leader in the land?

The flag which flies at half-mast,
As it flutters high in air,
But reads to man this lesson,
That is taught him everywhere—

That man being here abideth not,
Is cut down as a flower,
Is like the grass which "cometh forth,"
Which withers in an hour.

And so the flag at half-mast,
Which was yesterday masthead,
Tells in its mournful floating
Of a gifted statesman dead;

And reads this solemn lesson,
Alike to grave and gay—
It may float for you to-morrow
As it floats for him to-day.

A Night of Terror.

"O MAMMA, can I go? Say, can I go? I want to go so bad, mamma! Do get papa to let me!" And Fred Grant stood on one leg like a tired rooster, and hitched and twisted and did everything he could think of to show how anxious and excited he was.

Uncle Dan Hurley was going off for a week's hunting on the prairies, with a tent to live in, and he wanted Fred to go too. Just ask any boy if Fred was likely to want to go.

But papa and mamma could hardly decide hastily. "Say, mamma, can I? Say, mamma, can I go?" Fred kept asking over and over again, until at last papa said: "go out on the lawn and play while we talk it over, Fred. We will call you when we have decided.

Fred knew he had to go, but he did not do so willingly. He backed out of the room slowly, and hopping on one foot, so as to stay as long as possible, but he got out at last. As soon as he was gone his papa said: "Well, what do you think of it, mamma?"

"It would do him good," answered mamma. "But there is one objection—Dan will drink a little now and then."

"Surely he would not when he was out with a child in his care," said papa.

"Well, I don't know," answered mamma, thoughtfully, "I fear to risk it."

"I'll have a talk with him," said Fred's papa, "and if he will promise to stay thoroughly sober, I guess Fred may go."

Uncle Dan promised faithfully not to touch one drop of liquor while he was out. But if he meant to keep the promise, what made him take the little black jug of whisky along in his stores?

However, Mr. and Mrs. Grant knew nothing of that little black jug, so they trusted Uncle Dan's word, and let Fred go to the prairies with him.

O what fun they had at first! They were on horseback. Uncle Dan rode a stout gray, and had the tent folded and strapped to his saddle behind. He also had their small camp-kettle, while Fred carried the bag which held their provisions.

The first night they camped beside a beautiful

stream. They pitched their tent, made a fire, hung the kettle on a stick laid across two poles with crochets in them, and cooked their supper.

Fred turned the ponies out to eat the sweet prairie grass, fastening them to a stake with a long rope so they could not wander away. Then he sat on a log and watched his Uncle Dan preparing their supper. And when it was eaten, he slept in the tent with Uncle Dan. He thought it was "splendid." I don't think there ever was a boy who enjoyed a trip more than Fred enjoyed that one for several days.

But alas, alas! One evening when they unpacked their camp-stores, Uncle Dan took out the black jug he had hidden away. He did not let Fred see it, but the boy soon knew that something was the matter. He did not know what, but he saw that Uncle Dan, instead of being lively and telling stories, as usual, was stupid and sleepy. Fred asked if he was sick. Uncle Dan said, "No, only tired."

Fred was very tired himself, so he too very readily laid down in the tent and soon fell asleep. Uncle Dan always carefully put out the fire, so that it should not catch to the dry prairie grass. To-night the black jug made him forget to attend to it—he was not himself, you see.

And so it happened that some time in the night a bright light and a crackling sound woke Fred. He sprang up and saw a dreadful thing. The prairie was on fire all around them. Worse: the tent which they were under was in flames.

In agony the poor boy tried to wake his uncle; but the whisky had done its work too well. He could not even rouse him. And every instant the scorching flames came hotter and nearer. In a few moments they must both perish, unless the boy could save the man.

With a smothered prayer and a cry to God for help, Fred did all he could do. He rolled and tugged and pulled until, with his blistered hand, he rolled the insensible man into the little stream on whose banks they were camped.

Then he held Uncle Dan's head up, himself lying nearly under water, until the flames had passed on and left them. He tried to drag his chilled limbs back to shore, but could only draw Uncle Dan half way out of the water, until he came to his senses, where he lay.

And how do you think Uncle Dan felt when reason returned? Their tent and horses burned, their bodies all painful blisters, wet, chilled, and alone, miles away from home—all because he yielded to that dreadful appetite! They reached home at last alive. But Uncle Dan finally died from the effects of that night's exposure, and Fred will carry the scars of his burns to his grave. But he will never, never touch a drop of liquor so long as he lives.

Beginnings of Evil.

SAID Frank to his mother, one day: "Our school is a dreadful place, mother. I don't believe there is a boy in the whole school who does not use bad words."

"Why, Frank!" exclaimed the astonished mother—"not one? Where is my boy?"

"No, not one; even I sometimes say words that I know are wrong. It's catching, and you're surprised into it before you think. I wish you could help me to do something about it."

She promised to help him first to set a watch over his own lips, and then she encouraged him to speak to the boys, and try to get up a sentiment in the school against the practice. She realized the importance of this, as every good mother must. And she was rewarded—in her own boy, at least; for he grew up to be a noble, pure, good man, and one who did a great deal toward helping others out of the wrong path into the right one.

LESSON NOTES.

FIRST QUARTER.

STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF MARK.

A. D. 28]

LESSON V.

[Feb. 3

THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER.

Mark 4. 10-20.

Commit to memory verse, 20.

GOLDEN TEXT.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. Mark 4. 23.

OUTLINE.

1. The Mystery of the Kingdom, v. 10-12.
2. The Meaning of the Parable, v. 13-20.

TIME.—28 A. D.

PLACE.—Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum.

CONNECTING LINKS.—A year has passed since the events of the last lesson. It was a year of eventful life. The twelve apostles had been gathered around their Master, the second passover season had passed, Jerusalem had once more witnessed notable miracles, hate and enmity had begun to centralize against him, a second tour among the cities of Galilee had occurred, and Jesus had begun his series of awful denunciations of the Pharisees as hypocrites. His work at Galilee was rapidly hastening to its close at the point where our lessons once more take up Mark's narrative.

EXPLANATIONS.—*Parable*—An imaginary or real occurrence or thing by which some truth is illustrated. *The mystery of the kingdom of God*—The things which are mysterious about the relations of God to men can only be known to those to whom they are revealed by the Spirit. *See and not perceive*—The natural heart is blind to spiritual things; while men see with the eye the wonderful things occurring in God's providence, they fail to spiritually discern their meaning. *Hear and not understand*—Explain in a similar way for yourself. *Stony ground*—Not gravelly soil, but rock slightly covered with soil. *Among thorns*—Ground from which the thorns, or brambles, or wild briars had not been uprooted, and in which, therefore, no grain could grow.

QUESTIONS FOR HOME STUDY.

1. *The Mystery of the Kingdom.*
What was the parable the disciples and others asked him the meaning?
Where had it been spoken?
What sight in the landscape might have suggested this parable to Jesus?
Was Jesus surprised that they failed to catch his meaning?
In ver. 13 does Jesus mean that he purposely tried to speak blindly to the outside multitude?
What is the mystery of the kingdom? 1 Tim. 3. 16.
What does Jesus mean by ver. 12?
Are men in fault for spiritual deafness and blindness, or is God in fault?
How many men have eyes and ears and understanding opened?
2. *The Meaning of the Parable?*
In the application of the parable, who is the sower, and what is the seed?
What is the soil?
Who are way-side hearers?
Who are stony ground hearers?
Who are the hearers among thorns?
Is there any fault here with sower or seed?
What sort of a picture of human life, as you know it, is here painted?
Do you find any wonderful characteristic of Christ's personality in this explanation of the parable?

PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.

How hard for those nearest to Jesus to grasp the meaning of spiritual truth. Why is it?

Man is averse to truth by nature, and Satan is always at hand to keep him so if he can.

Satan comes (ver. 15). Not some adversity; not man's environment; not chance—but Satan. When? *Immediately on good influence touching the heart.*

HINTS FOR HOME STUDY.

1. Commit Mark's story of the parable (vers. 3-9) to memory.
2. Write out what you think this parable means:
 1. The sower means.
 2. The seed.
 3. The way-side.
 4. The fowls. and so on clear through.
3. Compare your explanation with that of Jesus.
4. Learn what you can about the Oriental customs suggested.

THE LESSON CATECHISM.

1. Who asked Jesus to explain the meaning of his parable? The twelve disciples and their friends.
2. What did Jesus say was contained in this parable? The mystery of the kingdom of God.
3. Who are they who sow good seed in the world? Teachers and preachers of truth.
4. What is the seed which they sow? The Word of God.
5. What admonition has our Golden Text for each hearer of this Word? "If any man have ears," etc.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION.—Fruit-bearing.

CATECHISM QUESTION.

7. In what other ways did he show this? By the heavenly wisdom, the authority, and a graciousness of his teaching.
- Luke iv. 22. And all bear him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth. John vii. 46: Luke xxiv. 32; Mark i. 22.

* These lines appeared in the *Evening Journal*, Ottawa, as the flag at half-mast, at the capital, were displayed on the occasion of the death of the Hon. Thomas White, Minister of the Interior, during the sitting of Parliament of the past year.