

Our Young Folks.

GRACE BEFORE MEAT.

BY WILLIAM MURRAY, HAMILTON.

Thanks, O God I to Thee for these
Tokens of Thy love.
And for what our souls can seize
Of the joys above.

Bless these earthly mercies, Lord,
For our health and strength,
And to us and ours accord
Heaven itself at length.

Our unholy spirits cleanse
In Thy living lake,
And forgive us all our sins
For our Saviour's sake. Amen.

BEFORE YOU ARE FIFTEEN.

I am nearly fifty, and if I could live backward and get back to the years before I was fifteen, oh how many things I would do! There is one thing I would do: I would make the best of things. A girl's life or boy's life is full of things (life has to be full of things that it may get full of thoughts)—things good, things hard, things indifferent. If a thing is good that is the end of it, and all you have to do is to take it and have a good time with it.

But that is not making the best of it; it is only taking the good of it.

Now, how can you make a good thing better or best?

If I should ask twenty-five of you what your good thing is, would I not have twenty-five good things in reply?

Would any one of you tell me that serving was among your good things? It was among Christ's good things. When He came down to earth would not God give Him good things—the best He had? Before He was fifteen do you know anything that He did beside obey and serve? (He was with the doctors in the temple, but He was hearing them as well as asking them questions.)

Now, to be like Him, make the best of your obedience and your serving—prompt, cheerful obedience, prompt, cheerful serving.

Would twenty-five of you give twenty-five different answers to the question: "What is your hard thing?"

Did Christ have to endure any hard thing before He was fifteen?

No doubt He had to work hard and live simply.

These two hardships are very hard for boys and girls now—a days—perhaps, you think, harder than in the days in which He lived.

Would you not love to see a piece of the work He did? Do you not believe it was perfectly done—that He made the very best thing He could of the work that was put into His hands?

And He had to learn; He had to learn obedience by the things that He suffered, by the things that happened to Him. If you make the best of your hardships before you are fifteen, you will have something to work with all your life—not only finished work, but you will become a finished workman.

About things indifferent—things not worth while. Ah, now you have something to make the best of!

It is not worth while to notice when somebody snubs you, or speaks unkindly. You can make the best of it by being as sweet as though it had not happened. And a disappointment: forget it; act as though you had had the very thing you wanted. Forgetting some unpleasant things is a lovely way to make the best of them. Do you know what Christ did before He was fifteen? He grew, not only in favour with God, but with men. It is worth while to make people love you; when people love you you can serve them. If every boy and girl under fifteen would do only two things, what a world this would be before you are fifty!

St. John tells us what these two things are:—

"This is His commandment, That we should believe on the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another."

Do you wish to be a strong man?

Do those two things.

Do you wish to be a lovely woman?

Do those two things.

Believe and love, and then you will make the best of everything that you have and that happens to you, and everything you do.

Make the best of the day that comes to you after you read this. You do not know what is the best.

Keep on doing and you will know; that is Christ's rule, and He learned it up in heaven with His Father.

HOLD FAST, BOYS.

Hold on to your tongue when you are just ready to swear, lie or speak harshly or use an improper word.

Hold on to your hand when you are about to punch, strike, scratch, steal or do any improper act.

Hold on to your foot when you are on the point of kicking, running off from study, or pursuing the path of error, shame or crime.

Hold on to your temper when you are angry, excited or imposed upon or others are angry with you.

Hold on to your heart when evil associates seek your company and invite you to join in their mirth, games and revelry.

THE STUDY OF GOD'S WORD.

Will it stimulate intellect?
Will it improve the mind?
Will it enable boys and girls to become better and more useful citizens?

Let us see. No other work of literature in all the ages contains such a variety of thought and the mind calls for variety in its food, the same as the body. Therefore, if the Bible contains the greatest variety, it is the "book of books" for this purpose. The Bible also contains the deepest and most profound thought of any book, it is then the best book for those who aspire to thorough scholarship.

It contains the grandest and most beautiful imagery. No other work extant, unless first suggested by the Bible, carries the mind to such lofty heights, or paints such pictures of the inner, and otherwise hidden glories. Do we desire to have our hearts soothed with the sweetest poetry? We find it in God's Word. Do we seek a little philosophy which touches every phase of humanity? We have it in the Word of God.

Do we wish to develop the mind, so it can grasp great questions, we find that God has placed the germs within His Word. How important, then, that every young mind be brought in contact with this Word, whose Author has looked down the ages and anticipated every human woe and want, and provided for every grand aspiration. So we find in God's Word the elements which enable us to do three of the most important things effecting the race, and enabling all who will to avail themselves of them.

1. A solid foundation-stone upon which to build a perfect character.

2. The material and the aid for erecting a superstructure which will stand the test of time and outlive the pyramids.

3. A linking of one's self to the mind of minds, the Author of both thought and being. Being thus uplifted to a height which widens at each successive step, we become capacitated to take a correct view of all other subjects as well as being in touch with the mind which is bound by no limits, and is constantly developing to us new and still more beautiful thoughts.

This enables one to live in an atmosphere fraught with grandeur, purity and beauty, fitting the immortal part of man for the enjoyments of these higher attainments, found in perfection only in the immediate presence of the God of wisdom, power and love.

HOW HE BEGAN.

A good many of the boys who read these pages will soon be "earning their way" in the world, if they are not already doing so. Here is a word to encourage them:—

Just above the wharves of Glasgow, on the banks of the Clyde, there once lived a factory boy whom I will call Davie. At the age of ten he entered a cotton factory as a "piecer."

He was employed from six o'clock in the morning till eight at night. His parents were very poor and he well knew that his must be a boyhood of very hard labour.

But then and there, in that buzzing factory, he resolved that he would obtain an education and become an intelligent and useful man. With his very first week's wages he purchased Ruddiman's "Rudiments of Latin."

He then entered an evening school which met between the hours of eight and ten. He paid the expenses of his instruction out of his own hard earnings.

At the age of sixteen he could read Virgil and Horace as readily as the pupils of the English grammar schools.

He next began a course of self-instruction. He had been advanced in the factory from piecer to a spinning-jenny.

He brought his books to the factory, and, placing one of them in the "jenny," with the lesson before him, he divided his attention between the running of the spindles and the rudiments of knowledge.

He entered Glasgow University. He knew that he must work his way; but he also knew the power of resolution, and he was willing to make almost any sacrifice to gain the end.

He worked at cotton-spinning in the summer, lived frugally and applied his savings to his college studies in the winter.

He completed the allotted course, and at the close was able to say, with praiseworthy pride: "I never had a farthing that I did not earn."

That boy was Dr. David Livingstone.

A DROP OF INK.

"I don't see why you won't let me play with Robert Scott," pouted Walter Brown. "I know he does not always mind his mother, and smokes cigars, and sometimes swears. But I have been brought up better than that. He won't hurt me, and I should think you would trust me. Perhaps I can do him good."

"Walter," said his mother, "take this glass of pure water and put just one drop of ink into it."

"O, mother, who would have thought one drop would blacken a whole glass so?"

"Yes; it has changed the colour of the whole, has it not? It is a shame to do that. Just put one drop of clear water in it and restore its purity," said his mother.

"Why, mother, you are laughing at me. One drop, nor a dozen, nor fifty won't do that."

"No, my son; and therefore I cannot allow one drop of Robert Scott's evil nature to mingle with your careful training, many drops of which will make no impression on him."

Sabbath School Teacher.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

Jan. 24. } ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL. { 1 Kings 18: 1-19.

GOLDEN TEXT.—How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow Him.—1 Kings xviii. 21.

INTRODUCTORY.

The people of Israel, since their separation from Judah, had sunk from bad to worse, till under Ahab and Jezebel they had become virtually a nation of idolaters. The worship of Baal, the sun-god, and Astarte, the moon-god, was universally prevalent. The evils of idolatry were everywhere manifest. Ahab had been warned, and the threatened punishment came. For over three years there had been neither rain nor dew. The land was barren, the people were starving, disease and death following. Ahab had sought for Elijah everywhere, but the prophet was kept in safety by God's protecting providence. At the appointed time the solitary man of God confronts Ahab and the idolatrous priests. The undaunted prophet proposes a test by which it should be determined whether God or Baal had power over nature. It was a test that could be understood by all. The place selected was a level spot on Mount Carmel. There the king and four hundred and fifty priests of Baal and vast multitudes of the people assembled. Elijah was alone, yet he was God's servant and God was with him. The proposal of the prophet was to prepare a sacrifice, place it on the altar, and appeal to the God that should answer by fire.

I. The Priests of Baal and the Test.—It is well known that heathen mysteries were the results of cunning and fraud on the part of the priests. Precautions were taken to prevent the priests of Baal from practising deception. The trial was to be a real one and was to be fairly conducted. Elijah gave his opponents the first place. They had the choice of the bullock to be offered. They were to dress it, preparatory to sacrifice, but they were to put no fire near it. In these arrangements they acquiesced. The trial began in the morning and lasted all day. The priests of Baal had every opportunity to make good the claims they put forth. They performed their accustomed rites, and cried earnestly: "O Baal, hear us!" but there was no response to their excited cries. The sacred historian says: "There was no voice nor any that answered." Then they became frantic in their demonstrations, "they leaped upon the altar." So far as the narrative is concerned, there is no intimation that Elijah said anything or did anything beyond calmly looking on and awaiting the result until the noon hour arrived. Then he began to mock the idolatrous priests. Here we have one of the most striking specimens of irony in the sacred scriptures. As a mode of showing the truth and exposing error it is sometimes very effective. It is so in this instance. The priests of Baal had been shouting to their god, and Elijah ironically tells them to cry aloud: "For He is a god." To this he added what would appear to all who heard him as absurd reasons for Baal's silence. They cried yet more frantically and "cut themselves after their manner" with the swords and spears they carried till they were covered with blood. To all these wild demonstrations there was no reply. Baal, being only an idol, and, as Paul says, an idol is nothing in the world, was silent. "There was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded." The idolatrous priests had deceived the people, and they were themselves deceived. It is possible that they expected some miraculous interposition in their favour, or they may have been conscious that they were impious impostors. Whatever might have been their expectations they were doomed to disappointment. Their failure was terrible as it was complete. They had to give up their efforts, being shamed before all the people. And their end was swift as it was terrible.

II. Elijah and the Test.—The representatives of Baal, having had ample time and opportunity, found all their efforts unavailing. They had done all they could, and it was utterly in vain. Now Elijah comes forward and invites the people to come near to him. He had nothing to conceal. All he had to do would bear the closest inspection and make the truth of his claims in God's behalf all the more apparent. His first act was to restore the altar of Jehovah, which had been thrown down and degraded by the idolatrous priests. His action was symbolic. "He took twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name." With those twelve stones he reared an altar in the name of Jehovah, for His glory and service. Around the altar he caused a trench to be cut, wide and deep enough to contain a considerable quantity of water. Then the sacrifice was prepared and placed upon the altar. The command was then given to fill four water jars, which could be done from a neighbouring spring. The water was poured over the victim and the altar. This was repeated a second and a third time at the prophet's command. Thus the sacrifice, the wood and the altar were drenched, and the trench round it was filled with water, rendering imposture or deception impossible. When three o'clock, the hour observed for the offering of the evening sacrifice, had arrived, Elijah approached the altar and solemnly invoked the presence of the covenant God of Israel. The invocation recalls the memory of what God had done for their ancestors, reminding the people that God's word remained unchangeably the same. The prophet prays that God would there make Himself known as the God of Israel, and that in all these great events in which Elijah had taken part he had acted under the divine command. He concluded his prayer with the request that the people might know God and return to Him. God immediately answered the prayer of His servant. There was no long waiting, no frantic outcries as in the case of Baal's priests. "The fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice." So intense was the flame that descended that not only the sacrifice, but the altar itself was consumed and the water in the trench was dried up. The miracle was complete, and the success of the test could not be gainsaid. The people who witnessed this ending of the day's contest were deeply impressed. They fell prostrate, and cried out: "Jehovah, He is God, Jehovah, He is God." It was a season of repentance. The deluded people had their eyes opened. They had been led into the sin of idolatry by corrupt and profligate rulers. It is also certain that they had been willingly deceived. The natural heart is enmity against God. Their own sinful inclinations had seconded the designs of wicked kings and false priests. The people had now found by a sad experience that their departure from God had brought upon them terrible disasters. Now they had seen by God's miraculous intervention how deeply they had sinned. They were awed by the display of the divine majesty. They saw that Baal was utterly powerless, and that the Lord God of their fathers was the Omnipotent Ruler, and with one voice they confessed that He alone was God. The remarkable day ended with the death of Baal's priests and Elijah's prayer for rain, which was answered.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

The moral grandeur of a man entirely devoted to God's service is clearly illustrated in the case of Elijah.

God will not give His glory to another. He is God alone. All idolatrous systems will perish and their worshippers be confounded.

When truth and error are brought to the test, truth invariably triumphs.

We are called upon to decide for God, and the decision should be immediate.