

Our Young Folks.

Hints About Letter-Writing.

Letter-writing is very much a matter of habit, and for that reason it is important that young people should learn early to consider it a pleasant way of communicating thoughts and feelings to their friends, instead of a burdensome task to be got over as quickly as possible.

We often hear people excuse themselves by saying that they have no "gift for writing letters," as though it were something like an ear for music, only accorded to a favored few. But the truth is that any one can write interesting and pleasant letters who will take a little trouble and really persevere in the effort.

A few simple rules, carefully observed, will help you over some of the things which you call difficulties. In the first place, always write distinctly. It destroys much of the pleasure in receiving a letter if it cannot be read without puzzling out every word.

Be particular in the matter of dating, giving every item distinctly, and sign the letter with your full name. If this habit is formed, you will not run the risk of losing valuable letters, which cannot be forwarded from the Dead Letter Office, unless accompanied with the full address.

You will find it more easy to reply to a letter soon after you get it than if you neglect it for a few weeks, because you will have the impression which the first reading made upon you. Tell your friend when you received the letter which you are answering, and take up the topics in the order in which they naturally come, remembering to answer all the questions which have been asked. Try to think what your friend would like best to hear about, and when you undertake to tell anything, do not leave it half told, but finish the story.

Do not consider anything too trivial to write about, which you would think worth mentioning in conversation. Writing letters is simply talking upon paper, and your friends will be much more entertained by the narration of little every-day affairs, than by profound observations upon topics which you care nothing about.

In writing to very intimate friends, who will be interested in the details of your daily life, it is well sometimes to make your letter a sort of diary—telling something of how you have spent each day since you wrote last; what books you have been reading; what letters you have received from mutual friends, and what you have heard or seen which has interested you.

Write all that you have to say on one subject at once. That is, do not begin to tell about your garden, and then about your school, and then about your garden again; but finish one subject before you begin another. Do not be afraid of using the pronoun I. Some people avoid it, and thus give their sentences a shabby and unfinished sound, as, "Went to Boston—called on Mrs. Smith." Never apologize for what you write, by saying that you do not like to write letters. You would not think it quite polite, in visiting a friend, to say, "I do not like to talk to you, so I shall not say much." Keep the idea before you that you are writing for the sake of giving pleasure to your friend.

When your letter is merely an inquiry, or on a matter of business, the case is different. You then should try to be as brief, concise, and clear as possible. An elaborately drawn out business letter is as out of place as it is inconsiderate.

"Do not think what to write, but write what you think," is an old rule, and a good one to remember. If you are away from home, it is very selfish not to share your good times with the family by writing frequent letters. You can tell what you are enjoying so much better while it is fresh in your mind, than you can after you return, when you may not have leisure to go over the whole ground; and these home letters may be a means afterward of refreshing your own memory, and reminding you of incidents which you would otherwise have forgotten. There are many other things which might be said here, but this will do for the present. A very good rule for letter-writing is the golden one, "Do as you would be done by."—From "A Letter to Letter-Writers," in St. Nicholas for March.

Losing Power to Believe.

The man who turns his back upon the known ways of Righteousness, loses, according to the degree in which he does so, the power to believe, and therewith the power to return to those ways. He who has never been born again, thinks that to believe on a God of grace is a very easy matter indeed. He does not know what sin is, and hence he cannot understand what grace is. But after a man has come to know what is meant by sin, and what is implied in grace, how hard does it become for him, after some sort of great unfaithfulness, to find again strength to believe!

Sabbath School Teacher.

INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

LESSON XI.

Mar. 1st. THE SPIRIT OF ELISHA. 2 Kings 1: 17-25.

COMMIT TO MEMORY, vs. 19-21. PARALLEL PASSAGES.—Num. xxvii. 20; Ex. xv. 25.

SCRIPTURE READINGS.—With vs. 18, 14, read Num. xi. 25; with v. 15, read Josh. iii. 7; with v. 16, read 1 Kings xviii. 12; with vs. 17, 18, Rom. x. 2; with v. 19, read Josh. vi. 17, 26; with vs. 20, 21, compare Ex. xv. 25; with v. 22, read Mark ix. 60; with v. 23, read Prov. xvii. 5; and with vs. 24, 25, Hos. xiii. 8.

PERSONS TO BE IDENTIFIED: Elijah, Elisha.

PLACES TO BE IDENTIFIED: Jordan, Jericho, Bethel, Carmel, Samaria. GOLDEN TEXT.—They said, the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.—2 Kings ii. 15.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—The Spirit is given to those who ask. One must see the whole of a thing before he can fairly judge of it. One must see a large portion of a life before he is able to comprehend its ruling aim.

There were witnesses of the double miracle, namely, Elijah's ascent in the fiery chariot, and his previous dividing of the waters.

I. ELISHA APPROVED AS NEXT PROPHET. "He took up the mantle." See the account of its being cast upon him, 1 Kings xix. 19. He thus accepted the trust, when it involved risk, suffering and persecution. He had faith in Him who called him; he proved and exercised it in the presence of enough witnesses. "He went back." He had no motive for going forward in that direction. No tie bound him to the Highlands of Gilead. He turns towards the place of his work. He "stood by Jordan." He has the mantle, the badge of office. He shows that he means to walk in his Master's steps by imitating his method: he "smote the waters," expressing his confidence, not in any magic, or inherent power in the mantle as a relic of a saint, or in the act, but in the God who made it mighty with his predecessor. "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" So all sacramental acts owe their power, not to anything in them or in him that administers, but to the blessing of Christ. The miracle of v. 8 was repeated.

And the right impression was made (v. 15) where it was proper, namely, in the minds of those at whose head he was now to stand. That miracle was part of his credentials. They said "the spirit of Elijah, etc." And they acknowledged ("recognized") him in all proper ways. He glorified not himself to be made a prophet (see Heb. v. 5). He has no trouble in procuring a place among them. He who poured water on Elijah's hands is now invested by God, they plainly see, with Elijah's power and commission. So we have light thrown on the mysterious journey and crossing of Jordan, in the last lesson. God's miracles always have an adequate object.

II. ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION ATTENDED.—The sons of the prophets only knew in part God's mighty acts. Who takes them in fully? The "Spirit of the Lord"—who dealt as he would with prophets (see 1 Kings xviii. 12; Ezek. iii. 12-14; and Acts viii. 39)—might have carried Elijah and cast him down "upon some mountain" (v. 16). Let them search for him. If they find him living, so much the better. If they find his body, they will render due honor to the dear remains.

Elisha says no. They insist till the gentle-hearted man, unwilling to seem arbitrary in his new place, and to repress roughly a good, though mistaken feeling, gives way. He knows that the "children of the prophets" have to learn some things by experience, and reminds them of it (v. 18) when they come back to Jericho from their bootless search. Parents, wise teachers, and even God himself, will sometimes let us try our wisdom and strength, though it is known we shall labor in vain. We learn lessons of value by the failure. They can now better comprehend that Elijah has entered into heaven—perhaps, also, the proof his translation gives of our resurrection.

III. ELISHA'S CHARACTERISTIC MIRACLE (v. 19-20). "The men" (the leading men, probably, "of the city," namely, Jericho, came to Elisha, who was more accessible, probably, than Elijah, with a plea for aid which the report of his power would lead them to believe he could render. For the "pleasantness" of the city of Jericho, in its site, see the word in Bible Dictionary and Geography. The plain was beautiful; but the water was bad, and that of the Jordan, five miles away, the nearest available. Did some part of the curse on Jericho still linger there? or was the brook by Jericho, a mile from it, simply like the rest of the streams from the eastern slope of the hills, which are still brackish?

He requires a new cruse or drinking vessel, the "new" corresponding to Elijah's watering of the altar (he has no charm, or natural agent to use), and this feature is intensified by "the salt," which does not sweeten, but spoil, water for use. The streams are described by Thompson and others.

The prophet again puts the work in the Lord's hand, and ascribes to Him the glory (v. 21): "Thus saith the Lord." The miracle is well fitted to make good impressions on the people, to conciliate, to show that Jehovah and not Baal is to be looked to for prosperity. "Godliness is profitable for all things." If the bitterness is to be taken out of any lot, God is to do it. If any life—in a community, or family, or nation—is to be sweetened, it must be left to Him. The miracle was permanent. When the book was written the waters were still sweet: "So they are now." "As for God, His way is perfect."

IV. A MIRACLE OF JUDGMENT (v. 23). This is not at Jericho, but at Bethel, the seat of one of the golden calves (1 Kings xii. 28, 29; xiii. 1-33), a cathedral town of the new worship, where the apostate Jews had, by inclination and interest, become thoroughly committed to it, Elijah is gone. What if this alleged successor could not be intimidated? He would, let alone, be a

kind of troublesome external conscience, always obtruding his reproaches! What if a mob could be incited against him to prevent him entering the city. If it succeeded, they would have the gain; if it did not, they would escape the blame. It would be so easy to say that "a set of thoughtless boys," etc., (see and study our Lord's precautions against being slain in a tumult). For the word children, like "boy" in the South, "garçon" in France, does not necessarily mean a mere "child." It is applied in Scripture to persons who have reached maturity. The slain are not called "little," though even that word would not prove childish. Nor is the assault in childish fashion. It implied intelligence, for a "bald-head," through the operation of leprosy, was a term of reproach: and when they say "Go up," they may have sneered at the report of Elijah's departure, as though they said, "A pretty story that of your master! why do not you also go up?" But, even if we accept the fact of their being little children, "even a child is known by its doings." They reflected the training given by their parents, and their parents are punished by their removal. Even so, parents who bring up their children to worldliness; selfishness, ambition, irreligion, and still more to open vice, are punished by the failures, heartless, and sometimes the conspicuous ruin of their children.

The prophet (v. 24) turned back and declared against them the divine anger—"in the name of the Lord." If they, or those whom they represented, supposed from the mild and gentle character of the man that he was a less formidable foe to sin than Elijah, this miracle—probably needful for the impression it made on idolaters—corrects the mistake. The place only described by the phrase "up by the way," the common route, which now is called the *Wally Suweinit*, was probably wooded closely then, and the haunt of wild beasts (see Judges xiv. 5; 1 Kings xx. 86; 2 Kings xvii. 25). Out of this wood came two she-bears and "sore forty-two children of them." Irreligion in any form, as lawless war, intemperance, dishonesty, and the like, is every day effecting wide-spread ruin, according to the working of divine providence.

We see the prophet afterwards at Mount Carmel, carrying on religious work (2 Kings iv. 25-25).

The following points, in addition to lessons indicated, may be dwelt upon. Beware of sins of the tongue—insults to aged servants of God—jeals at religion. God hates the sins, even of the young; He hates sin; old doomsmen, the best cure for them is that which God casts in, and the remainder must go to the fountain head of the disease. So God gives the new heart; and, finally, the power of godliness is more than the forms. Get it from God. "This God is our God."

SUGGESTIVE TOPICS.

Elisha—how nominated—called—trained tested at the last—his office—badge of it—evidence of it—by whom seen—their conduct—mistake—how corrected—state of Jericho—request implied—details—reason of them—result—lessons—the miracle of judgment—where—ground of it—lessons from it—evidence of Elisha's being successor to Elijah—source of power—to whom he gave the glory—the points children should remember.

THERE is reason to fear that Sabbath School workers sometimes fail to impress on the children the duty and advantages of attending church. Dr. Vincent, the great Sabbath School man of the Methodist Church, would have all the little children above the age of two and a half years, attend the preaching service of the church.

There are Sunday school workers, or rather shirkers, who provide themselves only with the broken weapons of half-studied lessons, who congratulate themselves that boys and girls will never know the difference. Such teachers ought to hear their scholars saying to each other, "I'm tired of Brown's baby-talk; how we cornered him with that question; he don't study his lesson worth a cent!"—Rev. W. F. Crofts in S. S. World.

HE was a "Bible-class teacher." There are men who count themselves a grade higher than Sunday-school teachers. They don't attend the teachers' meeting; nor do they use the uniform lesson; for they feel above all that. He was a man of this sort. He took for his lesson "The Sermon on the Mount." Of course he could teach that. He attempted to read the beatitudes one by one, explaining them as he read; but the first proved too much for him. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." "That means," he said, "'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' The 'poor in spirit' are—that means 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' The 'poor in spirit' are—well, I don't think I can improve on Scripture. 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' We'll pass on." This is a simple fact. The "Bible-class teacher" was right as to the limits of his ability. The only trouble was in his attempt to go beyond his capacity.

MR. MOODY'S best story, as far as we have heard, was that related in the course of his sermon on assurance in the first Congregational church last Sunday. It was the story of the Judge and his neighbor Sambo. Sambo was a pious, godly slave, and full of trouble at times. The judge was an easy-going man who knew little of spiritual turmoil. Out on a hunting excursion at one time, the judge says: "I don't see, Sambo, but I am better off than you. I have no trouble, no confidit, while you are always in a muss. How's that?" Sambo was sore puzzled for a reply. He had no Bible, and could not read it if he had. So he shook his head sorrowfully, "I dunno, massa, I dunno." In a little while, they came to a pool of water in which there were some ducks, and the judge, biased away, killing one duck and wounding another. "Quick, Sambo, get in there and get that wounded duck before it gets off." In went Sambo for the wounded duck, and came out reflecting, "I hab 'im now, massa. Ye see as how that thar dead duck's a sure thing. I see wounded, and I tried to get away from de debil. It takes trouble to coteh me. But massa you are a dead duck, dar is no squabble for you. The debil have you sure."

The Teacher's Weapons.

A writer in the *Sunday School World* says: What weapons are essential for every teacher as the smallest allowable equipment?

First, a Reference Bible, "Big-ter," or "The Teacher's," or at least the best that can be afforded. The American Bible Society have issued a "Centennial Reference Bible," as low as one dollar. The Bible should be the teacher's chief weapon.

As the "open sesame" to the Bible's wealth, every teacher should have a concordance. "Cruden" unabridged, if possible. With this he can turn upon any lesson a flood of topical Bible light, which is the "north light" of the teacher-artist. Besides these, every Sunday School worker should have a Bible Dictionary (Smith's), in three volumes, if he can, or at least, "Smith," in one volume. These three books—Bible, Concordance and Bible Dictionary—and at least one standard Sunday School periodical, are the least that every Sunday School worker can be expected to have as his weapons. As well send raisins to soldiers instead of bullets, as was once done, as to undertake Christian work with no suitable ammunition and equipment.

Dr. J. L. Withrow, formerly of Indiana, now of Boston, says: The teacher's responsibility is measured by the present facility of machinery; hence it is very much greater than in past years. Responsibility is measured also by the impressibility of the material put into his hands. The teacher comes before minds that are plastic and without opinions. There is nothing so delicate, so susceptible to impressions and so permanent in its impressions, as a child's mind.

Come and See.

"Come and see." This was Philip's terse and sagacious answer to Nathaniel when he had asked the incredulous question, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" It is not surprising that Nathaniel should doubt whether Israel's promised Messiah should issue from a little disreputable village, hidden among the hills of Galilee. There were no temples and no schools of the prophets there. The idea that Israel's deliverer should be a Nazarene seemed as ridiculous as it would have seemed to our countrymen, if fifty years ago it were predicted that an obscure youth on a Mississippi flat-boat should yet be President of the United States and the liberator of four million slaves. But Philip does not stop to argue the point. He returns the common-sense answer, "Come and see."

Nathaniel obeyed. He came to Jesus of Nazareth, and had not been ten minutes in his company before he saw that this remarkable person had seen very far into him while he was musing under a fig tree. That was the turning point in Nathaniel's life. He became a disciple at once, and is often mentioned afterward by his surname of "Bartholomew." Philip and himself became intimate associates in the chosen band of "the" twelve, and probably went out on mission tours together.

The curt and sensible sentence spoken by Philip to his doubting friend is the true counsel to be given to every one who is skeptical toward Christ and his Gospel.

The only satisfactory test of Christianity is the test of personal examination and personal experiment. The infidel class is mainly composed of those who have no personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ. That is, they have never come to him in humble prayer, and sought his enlightened grace, and endeavored to practise his rules of conduct. Without ever trying the moral medicines of the Great Physician, they contemptuously pronounce them an absurd quackery. Certainly they have never tried to "do his will," and, therefore, must not complain that they have no spiritual perception of his "doctrine." I honestly believe that if the noisiest skeptics of our day would spend a few weeks in patient trial of Christ's precepts, by doing just what Christ commands them, if they would earnestly pray to him, and endeavor to live according to his divine code, they would find their fog-bank of infidelity all drunk up by exposure to the sun of righteousness. The mass of infidels are not men who have made the personal experiment of trying to be what Jesus bids them be, or of doing what Jesus bids them do. Hume, one of the acutest of them all, confessed that he had never studied the New Testament and knew very little about Jesus Christ. If he had sincerely tested the efficacy of prayer by praying fervently himself; if he had gone to Jesus seeking light, and had found none; if he had practised Christ's precepts, and found himself the weaker and the worse from making the experiment, then Hume might with some show of reason pronounce prayer a "humbug," and Jesus of Nazareth a deception. Jesus Christ distinctly invites every weary and troubled soul: "Come unto me and I will give you rest." Do those who actually go to him, confessing weakness and sorrow and trouble, come away again without obtaining any sensible relief? Do those who sincerely seek him find only emptiness and ashes? Do those who pray aright find prayer a mockery? Do men who practise Christianity grow utterly sick of it, and confess that it is a worthless imposture? These are questions which every unbeliever and rejecter of Christ should squarely face.

Those of us who have tried Christ for ourselves, as a Redeemer, a friend, and a spiritual guide, can fearlessly say to the unconverted: "Come and see." Come and try Jesus for yourselves. We do not make any preposterous claims of perfection; but we do know that we are better men and women—stronger, happier, purer, and more holy—for being followers of Jesus. "We know whom we have believed," and of this actual experience no scoffer can outwit us, and no gainsayer can rob us.

Many a poverty-stricken Christian can say: Come and see how much sunshine my religion pours into my sootily-furnished home. Many a converted sensualist can say: Come and see how much cleaner my life is since I gave my heart to Jesus. From thousands of death chambers have gone out the triumphant testimony: "For me to live was Christ; for me to die is

gain." When the great philosopher, Sir David Brewster, was dying, he said to Sir James Simpson: "I have had the light for many years, and oh! how bright it is! I feel so perfectly sure, so perfectly happy." Brewster, the prince of opticians, knew what physical light was. Do you suppose that he did not know spiritual light from actual experience? He knew what truth was. Do you suppose that a man of his discernment was pilloving his dying head upon an egregious lie? Into his religion he had carried the simplest and plainest principle of scientific investigation. He came, and saw for himself.

To this practical test of actual results the controverted question of the efficacy of prayer must finally be brought. If in all ages and under all circumstances human prayer had never received answers from Heaven and never brought any actual blessings, then the breath spent in it was foolishly wasted. If it can be proved that God has given to men in manifold instances the blessings they asked him for, then you and I need not be disturbed by all the clamor raised in "the seat of the scorners."

By the way, a remarkable train of circumstances has lately occurred in Belfast, Ireland, which to my mind looks like more than a mere coincidence. In July last the British Association of Science met there, and the brilliant Tyndall uttered some sharp words, which grieved and wounded the friends of Evangelical faith not a little. "No small stir arose about that way." A few weeks afterward our countrymen, Messrs. Moody and Sankey, visit Belfast, and commence a series of religious services. Fervent prayers are put up all over Ireland for a divine blessing upon the labors of two plain, honest preachers of Jesus Christ. What happens? All Belfast is shaken as it never was before. Multitudes hear the Word gladly. Drunkards quit their whiskey and become sober men. Intelligent men are converted. The vicious are made better. There stand the undeniable results. And now the believers in Christ and in prayer can send over to their late guests, the skeptical scientists: "Come and see!"

To every reader of this article I give the same words of loving invitation. Come and see Jesus my Saviour for yourselves. Look at his life. Study his works and his words. See what they have done for wicked, suffering humanity. Accept him as your atoning Saviour and guide. There you will see what He can do for you.—Theodore L. Cuyler, D.D.

Experiment in Religion.

Why do not skeptics resort more to experiment in the matter of religion? They greatly admire the experimental sciences, and we can assure them that religion has a place among these, and is one of the most practical of subjects. This is the testimony of Christians, and is also the doctrine of Scripture. "Taste and see that the Lord is gracious." "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord." "If any man will do his (the Father's) will, he shall know of the doctrine." If skeptics would pray earnestly for light, and then would live according to the light they have, practising all the religious truth they know, they would be led on from step to step in the experience of God. Having thus obtained the facts of religion, they could more intelligently begin to construct its science.—Congregationalist.

Jonah's One Sermon.

Jonah was but one man, and preached but one sermon, and it was but a short sermon as touching the number of words, and yet he turned the whole city, great and small, rich and poor, king and all. We have many preachers here in England, and we preach many long sermons, and yet the people will not repent and convert. This was the first fruit, the effect, and the good that his sermon did, that the whole city, at his preaching, converted, and mended their evil living, and did penance in sackcloth. And yet here in this sermon of Jonah is no great oratoriousness, no great clerkliness, no great affectation of words, nor of painted eloquence; it was none other but, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed." It was no more. This was no great oratorical sermon, but a nipping sermon, a pinching sermon, a biting sermon; Do you not here marvel these Ninevites cast not Jonah into prison? that they did not revile him nor rebuke him; but God gave them grace to hear him, and to convert, and amend at his preaching. A strange matter, so noble a city to give place to one man's sermon.—Bishop Latimer.

Drinking in Sweden.

In Sweden, the government control of the drinking-places is said to have resulted in great good; so that Norway has already in many of its large cities, although not yet in Christians, set the same plan in operation. The method is original and must be altogether shocking to our American Temperance Society folk; the temperance societies become sellers of rum!

The municipal authorities of the large towns in Sweden, and first in Gottenberg, gave the whole liquor trade into the hands of certain societies composed only of the most respectable citizens. These societies buy wholesale the best—that is to say undiluted liquor—and are in every way responsible for its retail. No intoxicating liquors can be sold except by vendors whom they have chosen, and who follow regulations drawn up by the societies, and pay the latter a certain sum annually for the privilege. The regulations require that no intoxicating liquors are to be sold after ten o'clock, or between five o'clock Sabbath evening and nine Monday morning. Great care is also taken to have food and such intoxicating beverages as coffee and tea placed before the customers wherever brandy is sold. All the profits accruing to the societies which have control of the liquor trade are devoted to public and charitable purposes and institutions.—Philadelphia Medical Times.

THERE are computed to be 20,000 deaf mutes in the United States.