

then go out. They were thrown into panic, v. 8. Their previous course of conduct overtook them, quite unready. In their shiftlessness, they had forgotten all about the oil, v. 3. Now they suffered for it. The wise, on the other hand, who had prepared carefully (v. 4), were not taken aback, v. 10. In the hour of crisis the two groups were seen to be as different as could be. Character is not transferable, v. 9. We must each prepare for ourselves by wise living in anticipation of Christ's return. Others cannot be wise for us, Gal. 6 : 5.

3. *Character is irrevocably determined in the passing of a crisis*, vs. 10-13. Our characters are the summation of the crises through which we have passed. We are only recognized as what we have made ourselves (vs. 11, 12; ch. 12 : 43-45), or what we have allowed the grace of Christ to make us, 1 Tim. 1 : 12-14. At Christ's second coming character passes over into destiny, Rev. 22 : 11, 12.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

There is an Eastern proverb which says, "The best orator is he who turns the ears of his hearers into eyes"—who makes them see the things of which he speaks. Is it not true emphatically of the teacher? And is not this passage one, where, conspicuously, the conscience and heart are to be reached through the eye. There are eleven verses; *ten* of them are taken up with the picture: only one with the statement of the lesson to be learned. The time of the class will be not wasted, but well spent, if the whole scene is made to live before the eyes of the scholars; what it all means is plain as day.

It will be well, however, following our Lord's example, to link the parable on to His previous words. Go back to the group of eager, wondering disciples, with their pointed questions, ch. 24 : 3. As to the time, follow on to vs. 36 and 44, illustrating by v. 43. These facts may be summed up: Jesus is certainly to come again; when, none know; at His coming, those who are ready will receive blessing, those who are unprepared will be cast away. This hurried glance will prepare for the parable. Try a few questions such as the following.—Who spoke the parable? To whom? What had they been asking of Him?

What was His answer? What did He tell them to do?

Now for the parable. What is it about? ("The kingdom of heaven": be sure and make clear, that, in this passage, it is the kingdom coming, not the kingdom in our hearts, or in the world.)

"Ten virgins"—bridesmaids. Wherefore ten? A round number for the convenience of the story; or perhaps ten was a customary number of bridesmaids.

Get the scholars to describe (see HOME STUDY QUARTERLY or HOME STUDY LEAFLET) the bridegroom's procession in the night; the maidens going out to meet it, and to go in with it to the wedding feast.

What need of lamps? It was night; and in Eastern cities there were no street lights. What the need of extra oil? Have the scholars describe the lamps (see Illustration in QUARTERLY or LEAFLET). The lamps were small, and the waiting time uncertain.

Five; and five? Wherein did the one five differ from the other? vs. 2-4. These two words look alike—"ready," "unready"; only two letters of difference, but, as we shall see, a difference of eternal gain and eternal loss.

The long waiting time; they "*all* slumbered and slept"—rested. Had all a right to rest? Again, we shall see.

The cry, "He comes," v. 6. Describe the excitement of the waiting maidens.

Then the sad plight of the five foolish ones—their lamps going out, no more oil; and no one admitted to the feast without a lamp burning; midnight, and those that sold oil sound asleep in their beds. What a picture of unreadiness and of hopelessness!

Were the other five selfish in not sharing their oil? Let the scholars read the first part of v. 9 carefully. It was a case where one could not help another (compare Rom. 14 : 12).

Then follows the coming of the bridegroom, the going in to the marriage, and the shutting of the door. How glad for those who were shut in. But how sad for those who were shut out. What a bitter wail, v. 11; and the reply like a death knell, v. 12.

There is little need to explain or enforce v. 13. The reading of it is enough. It stands out luridly.