

THE BEST-CHRISTMAS YET.

MRS. HARRIET A. CHEEVER.

It was the day after Christmas, and Mr. Burleigh, returned from business, was putting on dressing-gown and slippers as he said cheerily:

"Well, wife, how have the children been to-day? Very happy, I take it, after all the fun of yesterday."

"Miserable, just miserable!" was the discouraged reply. "They've contended over their playthings, wishing in almost every case we had given them something different from the article received."

"The trouble is," the mother added, "our children have learned to expect too much, and are actually becoming exacting in their requirements."

"I always thought," said Mr. Burleigh, "that it was hardly possible to do too much for the benefit of young people."

"And in certain directions it is impossible to do too much for them," his wife replied, "but the serious question for us to consider is, what is really for their benefit? I really believe that if Joe and Mamie and Fred and Bessie, should fail to receive another single present for two, or even three years it would be the best thing for them possible. By that time they might be in a fit state to enjoy a few judiciously selected presents."

Nearly a year had passed rapidly away. One morning about the first of December, while the family were gathered around the breakfast table, Mr. Burleigh gave a detailed account of a visit made the previous day at the house of a poor woman whose husband had died some months before.

And only the next morning again at breakfast, Mr. Burleigh had another story to tell of a family of emigrants who had settled in an alley at the rear of his store, and the father having been taken sick directly upon their arrival in a strange country, their condition was deplorable in the extreme. That same evening Mr. Burleigh had a long talk with his wife.

A morning or two later, Joe remarked with a merry chuckle,

"Oh, ho! Christmas is almost here, then hurrah for the Christmas tree!"

"Yes, hurrah for the Christmas tree!" echoed Fred.

But Mr. Burleigh remained quite sober in the midst of their pleased surmises, and said seriously,

"I doubt very much if we have a Christmas tree this year."

"Why, papa Burleigh!" exclaimed a chorus of young voices.

"How many presents do you suppose the Meeker children will receive this year?" asked Mr. Burleigh, "the children of the widow about whom I told you a morning or two ago. Then there are the Switzenburrs, the forlorn foreigners whose father is still so very low that the city physician has doubts of his recovery."

"Well," broke in Joe, a troubled look on his face, "we can send some of our old playthings to the Meeker children; we always send some away."

"The Meekers need a great deal beside toys and such things," said Mr. Burleigh gravely.

"I don't see why we can't have a Christmas-tree, and help the poor folks too," said Mamie, with a rebellious look.

"Poor folks needn't expect Christmas presents," put in Frank.

"Not now ones," added Bessie.

Mr. Burleigh looked grieved. Had superabundance of needless gifts developed selfishness to such pitiless degree in his own dear children?

"What made Jesus Christ come down to earth?" suddenly asked their mother.

"To save sinners," promptly answered two or three voices.

"Did he please himself?"

"For even Christ pleased not himself," answered well-instructed Mamie and Bessie.

"Did he come to minister unto?"

"The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister," again answered the little girls; the boys looked sullen and made no replies.

"Now, I have decided," began Mr. Burleigh, "to put a sum of money in your mother's hands, to be used in any way all you four can agree upon as being the best way and most acceptable one in the sight of God. If you decide that your customary presents cannot be dispensed with

the week before Christmas, this money can be equally divided among you, and you can choose your own gifts. Or, if in a few days you conclude that, in view of the crowded state of the play-room, book-shelves and toy-closet, you will on the Christ-day strive to please others rather than yourselves, you can count on all needed advice and assistance from both mother and me. I leave the matter entirely with you."

"We don't know what those foreign folks want," said Joe doggedly.

"Oh, no," said Mr. Burleigh, pleasantly: "it will involve going to see them in order to find out. I would be happy to take you there any time; lads of fourteen and eleven are none too young to learn a little something of the necessities of the poor."

"Then I suppose girls of ten and twelve are none too young either," said their mother. "I'll take my little daughters to call on the Meekers any time they may wish to go."

The parents were painfully cognizant of the dissatisfied faces of the four children as they passed out of the dining-room, but no further notice was taken of them.

"Humph! pretty to do, I should think!" ejaculated Joe, as they filed disconsolately into the library. "No Christmas-tree, and no presents unless we buy them ourselves! Nice, isn't it, to see your Christmas money going to a lot of foreigners and beggars!"

"Taint gone yet," said Mamie. "There's one thing about it," said Bessie, the youngest, "they'd be pretty sure to like whatever they got."

"I was—thinking," began Mamie, thoughtfully, "how it would seem if I never had presents, to have some good, kind people come and give me lots of things that I liked and needed."

"That would be kinder nice," said Joe, looking a little mollified.

"Yes, and I suppose toys and candy are just as sweet and nice to poor folks as to us," said Bessie.

The children discussed but little else except the matter of the Christmas money for a day or two; then Mr. Burleigh improved an opportunity of taking the two lads to call at the Switzenburrs, and the same afternoon Mamie and Bessie went with their mother to the home of the Meekers.

"Did you notice, mamma," Mamie asked the next day, "how cold the room was at Mrs. Meeker's, and what a miserable thin-looking old quilt she had on the bed?"

"Yes, Mamie, I noticed it, and I have no doubt that miserable as it appeared it was the best quilt she owned. Suppose you and Bessie, with my assistance, make a pair of thick, warm comforters; it would not take very long, and would leave all the more money for other things than if we bought them ready made."

"Oh, delightful!" exclaimed Mamie, and off she ran to find Bessie, who was equally ready to put some work into their new plan.

It would take far too much space were half the details related of the next three weeks' doings at the Burleighs' house. But the children declared over and over again that they had never begun to feel so happy in anticipation of expected Christmas gifts as they did in looking forward to bestowing these real benefits upon others; and Joe declared with boyish eagerness that it seemed as if the day would never come.

At last all the arrangements were completed. On Christmas morning, Joe and Fred presented themselves at the barren home of the Switzenburrs, their arms filled with offerings in the way of toys, rice, sugar and candy. Soon after their arrival a waggon drove up, from which was handed out the materials for a goodly dinner,—baskets of coal, some wood and a bag of flour; then appeared some coarse but warm bedding.

As the different supplies were crowded into the two rooms, the little children fairly shouted for joy, while the poor father, slowly recovering from his long illness, raised his thin hands, ejaculating feebly: "Mine Gott! Oh, mine goot Gott! How we tanks thee!" and fourteen-year-old Joe, unused to such touching scenes, whispered huskily to Fred:

"I say, let's put out of this; it makes a feller want to blubber right out loud!"

But Fred, full of the joyous spirit of the scene, was saying to the German mother:

"I only wish I knew how to cook; I'd take hold and help you get the dinner."

But the blushing little woman replied briskly:

"Oh, I cooks vell 'nough ven I geds de tings to gook mit;" and finding that Joe had already skipped off, Fred followed him amidst a shower of imperfectly expressed feelings. Joe's double query, as Fred joined him, would have sounded incongruous enough to one unacquainted with its bearings:

"Well, Freddy, my boy, wasn't it most enough to break your heart, and didn't it make you fairly want to shout for joy!"

As they entered their own home Joe made another telling observation:

"See here, Fred, did ever this dear old house seem so warm, or smell so sweet, or look half so beautiful as it does this moment?"

And the merry-hearted Fred, impressed with Joe's serious manner, answered thoughtfully:

"Honestly, Joe, I was just thinking that myself."

Mamie's eyes looked a little red, but Bessie, all life and animation, sprang at once to her papa's knee, exclaiming:

"Oh, papa Burleigh, if you only could a-seen little Kittie and Jessie Meeker when we took out the candy bags! They just squealed! Mrs. Meeker, she couldn't say it when she tried to thank us for the comforters, and the provisions that came from

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SCHOLARS' NOTES.

(From International Question Book.)

LESSON II.—JANUARY 13.

A SABBATH IN THE LIFE OF JESUS.—Mark 1: 21-31.

COMMIT VERSES 21, 22.

GOLDEN TEXT.

As his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day.—Luke 4: 16.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

Jesus and his religion are full of blessed words and works for all.

DAILY READINGS.

M. Mark 1: 12-20.
T. Mark 1: 21-31.
W. Matt. 8: 14-17.
Th. Luke 4: 31-41.
F.—Ps. 103: 1-22.
Sa. Ps. 42: 1-12.
Su. Luke 1: 68-80.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.

Jesus next spends the last part of a year and a half in Galilee. 21. *Capernaum*: a city on the north-west coast of the Sea of Galilee, supposed to have contained 30,000 inhabitants. *Synagogue*: a place of assembly, like our modern church. 22. *Teacher*: authority; he spoke as one who knew all things, for he did know. *Scriptures*: the learned people of the Jews. 23. *Unclean Spirit*: called unclean, because he made the man unclean, unholy, vile, in body and soul. 25. *Hold thy peace*: the testimony of a bad spirit would injure a good cause. Even the truths a liar tells are thought to be lies. 26. *Cried with a loud voice*: an inarticulate cry, not a word of speech, which Jesus had forbidden. 27. *What new doctrine*: rather, teaching; referring to both matter and manner. *And they do obey him*: his miracles added authority to his words. 29. *Forthwith*: immediately. 30. *Sick of a fever*: Luke says, a great fever; they were common at Capernaum on account of the marshes. 31. *She ministered*: showing that the cure was instantaneous and complete. 32. *At even*: they came then, (1) as the pleasantest time for the sick; (2) the news had just got around; (3) their Sabbath ended at sunset, and the people felt at liberty to go abroad and do any needed work. 34. *Healed many*: showing the divine mission of Jesus, to heal, to help, to comfort, to save. *Divers*: various. *Suffered not the devils to speak*: they know his true nature, but it would be bad to have the false and bad bear testimony to the true and holy.

SUBJECT: THE BLESSED WORDS AND WORKS OF JESUS.

QUESTIONS.

I. WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE (vs. 21, 22).— "And they went into Capernaum," from what place? (v. 16. Luke 4: 16, 31.) What can you tell about Capernaum? Point it out on the map. How did Jesus spend his Sabbaths? What does his example teach us? Why ought we to attend church on the Sabbath? What is a synagogue?

What did the people think of Jesus' teaching? What is meant by doctrine here? Why were the people astonished? How did Jesus' teaching differ from that of the Jewish teachers? What peculiar authority had the teaching of Jesus?

II. DELIVERANCE FROM EVIL SPIRITS (vs. 23-28).—What happened while the services of the synagogue were in progress? What is an unclean spirit? Why are demons called unclean? How can such have power over men? What did this demon call Jesus? What contrast is expressed by unclean spirit and Holy One of God? Why did Jesus silence him? What did Jesus do for the man? What does this express to us of the power of Christ? (Eph. 6: 10-12.)

What comfort and help can we derive from this power in our Saviour? What are some of the evil spirits which need to be cast out in our day? Can Jesus cast them out?

III. SAVING HELP IN SICKNESS (vs. 29-31).—Which of Christ's disciples lived at Capernaum? Who was sick? Meaning of anon? Why did he take her by the hand? What shows that the cure was complete? What are we told to do in sickness? (James

5: 14, 15.) How does Jesus help us now in our sicknesses? (James 5: 15; Rom. 8: 28; John 11: 4.)

IV. GREAT DELIVERANCES FROM MANY TROUBLES (vs. 32-34).—Who gathered around Jesus in the evening? Why did they wait till after sunset? In what way did the well help the sick? What example is this for us?

What kind of diseases were healed? What does this healing show as to the character of Christ? As to the compassion of God? (Ps. 103: 2-5.) Does Christianity still do this same work of healing? (John 14-19.) In what ways?

In what respects is sin like a disease? How does healing the body typify the healing of the soul? How does relieving the bodily wants of men aid us in saving them from sin?

LESSON III.—JANUARY 20.

HEALING OF THE LEPER.—Mark 7: 35-45.

COMMIT VERSES 40, 41.

GOLDEN TEXT.

As soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.—Mark 1: 42.

CENTRAL TRUTH.

Sin is a terrible evil; but Jesus will save all who go to him in faith.

DAILY READINGS.

M. Mark 1: 35-45.
T. Matt. 4: 23-25; 8: 1-4.
W. Luke 4: 42-44; 5: 12-15.
Th. Luke 17: 11-19.
F. Matt. 15: 21-31.
Sa. Ezek. 36: 22-32.
Su. Eph. 2: 1-10.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.

35. *A great while before day*: this was Jesus' only method of being alone for prayer and communion with God. Every one needs solitary seasons of prayer. *And there prayed*: like us, Jesus needed communion with God. Especially as now he was about to enter upon a new plan of work, and go forth with his disciples on their first missionary tour. 36. *And Simon*: Peter, as usual, taking the lead. 38. *Therefore came I forth*: from heaven and his Father. He came to teach and preach to all. 40. *A leper*: one afflicted with the leprosy, a foul, deforming, incurable, hereditary, contagious, painful disease that shut men out from the companionship of the pure. *If thou wilt, thou canst*: this was the first time a leper had asked to be healed, so far as recorded; but the man knew that many had been healed of terrible and deadly diseases by Jesus, and therefore knew he could heal him. But he feared that Jesus would not want to help a deformed, impure outcast. 41. *Touched him*: to show that the healing came from him. It expressed Jesus' compassion. It could not dole Jesus for the curative power was in him. *I will*: men healed by instrumentalities; Jesus by the act of his will. 44. *Says nothing to any man*: (1) He must not touch others till he was ceremonially clean. (2) Jesus did not wish to call attention to his miracles, but to lay emphasis on his teaching. (3) It would draw so many to be healed that he would have no time to preach. *Offer for thy cleansing*: (Lev. 14: 4-7.) *For a testimony*: he must go to Jerusalem, and let the authorized priests declare the healing perfect. It testified also that Jesus obeyed the law.

SUBJECT: AN OBJECT LESSON OF SIN AND SALVATION.

QUESTIONS.

I. PREPARATION FOR WORK BY PRAYER (v. 35).—Where did Jesus go early the next morning? Why did he rise so early? Why go to a solitary place? What need did Jesus have of prayer? (Heb. 4: 15.) Can we work well for Christ without much prayer? Why not? Why do we need secret prayer as well as public worship? What command did Jesus give about this? (Matt. 6: 6.) How many and what lessons do we learn from this example of Christ?

II. CARRYING THE GOSPEL TO ALL MEN (vs. 36-39).—Who noted Jesus' absence, and went out to find him? What did they say to Jesus? Why did the people seek Jesus? Was this a reason why Jesus should go out and preach?

What did Jesus now propose to do? What reason did he give? How long did this missionary tour last? Over what region did it extend? Why is casting out devils mentioned again? How would his healing help his preaching? In what ways is the religious work of saving men aided by ministering to their temporal wants? Should the two always go together?

III. THE LEPROSY: A TYPE OF SIN (v. 40).—What one incident of this tour is told? What is a leper? Are there any such in our day? Describe the leprosy. Show how it is a type of sin in its all-pervasive loathsomeness and impurity (Rom. 1: 23-32; Matt. 15: 19); its being incurable by human power (Rom. 7: 21, 25); its contagiousness (1 Cor. 15: 33); its being often hereditary (Rom. 5: 12); its deforming effects; its shutting out from the companionship of the pure. (Rev. 21: 27.)

IV. THE CURE: A TYPE OF SALVATION (vs. 40-44).—What did the leper say to Jesus? Did these words show faith? In what respects was this leper an example of the way in which the sinner should come to Christ? How did Jesus heal him? Why did he touch him? What was the effect? What did Jesus tell him to do? Why must he say nothing? What offering must he make? Where? How would this be a testimony unto them? To what should every converted sinner testify? Did the man obey? What were the effects of his disobedience?

LESSON CALENDAR.

(First Quarter, 1889.)

1. Jan. 6.—The Mission of John the Baptist.—Mark 1: 1-11.
2. Jan. 13.—A Sabbath in the Life of Jesus.—Mark 1: 21-34.
3. Jan. 20.—Healing of the Leper.—Mark 1: 35-45.
4. Jan. 27.—Forgiveness and Healing.—Mark 2: 1-12.
5. Feb. 3.—The Parable of the Sower.—Mark 4: 10-20.
6. Feb. 10.—The Fierce Demoniac.—Mark 5: 1-20.
7. Feb. 17.—The Timid Woman's Touch.—Mark 5: 25-34.
8. Feb. 24.—The Great Teacher and the Twelve.—Mark 6: 1-13.