

THERE was once in this country a wild young prince, who selfishly indulged in all the enjoyments and passions of youth. By his father's deathbed he was brought to a sense of better things, and from that moment his soul went on constantly aspiring to higher and severer courses of duty. It was King Henry V. He specially attended to the complaints of the poor, and of these who had none to help them. Unlike his ancestors and his kindred, he never swore any profane oath. He had only two words to express the strength of his determination, and show what his resolution was. When anything was proposed to him that was wrong, his one word was, "Impossible"; when anything in the shape of a duty came before him, he had only one word, "It must be done." This is an example, in times gone by, of how the hunger and thirst after righteousness is filled—by conquest over ourselves.—A. P. STANLEY.

It is instructive to compare the beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount with the beatitudes of the Pentateuch. The reward promised to obedience in the Book of Deuteronomy is, "Blessed shalt thou be in thy basket and thy store." Righteousness is commended as a thing desirable, not so much for its own sake as in order to gain external prosperity. And in modern preaching this Old Testament method is very commonly adopted, though the rewards and punishments may be shifted to another life. Consequently, if one of us had to express in his own words the idea of the text in the form in which he has received it, it would be apt to run, "Blessed are ye who hunger and thirst for *salvation*, for ye shall obtain it."—G. SALMON.

RAILWAYS and steamboats cannot speed the soul to its perfection. This must come, if it come at all, from each man's action on himself, from putting forth our power on the soul and not over nature, from a sense of inward, not

outward, miseries; from hunger and thirst after righteousness, not after wealth.—W. E. CHANNING.

THERE are two kinds of good possible to men: one enjoyed by our animal being, the other felt and appreciated by our spirits. Every man understands more or less the difference between these two; between prosperity and well-doing; between indulgence and nobleness; between comfort and inward peace; between pleasure and striving after perfection; between happiness and blessedness. These are two kinds of harvest, and the labour necessary for them respectively is of very different kinds. The labour which procures the harvest of the one has no tendency to secure the other. We will not depreciate the advantages of this world. It is foolish and unreal to do so. Comfort, affluence, success, freedom from care, rank, station—these are in their way real goods; only the labour bestowed upon them does not procure one single blessing that is spiritual. On the other hand, the seed that is sown for a spiritual harvest has no tendency whatever to procure temporal well-being. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" *with righteousness*. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"—that is the principle.—F. W. ROBERTSON.

REMEMBER, then, that wishing for a religious object is *not* religion: talking about religion is not religion. All the doctrines, all the facts of our religion, are means to the great end of making us such as Christ was. Let nothing else obscure in your minds the importance of the question, Are you proving the reality of your life in Him by daily growing more and more like Him in meekness, patience, self-denial, love? For if these graces be wanting, however much a man may seem to be religious, he deceiveth his own heart, his religion is vain.—G. SALMON.

The International Lessons.

I.

Isaiah lv. 1-13.

THE GRACIOUS CALL.

1. "The sure mercies of David" (ver. 3), or "the un-failing loving-kindnesses" given to David and to his seed. Is this the historical David, or is it great David's greater son? The question has been much debated. Jeremiah and Ezekiel certainly speak directly of the Christ under the name David (Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; Ezek. xxxiv. 22-24, xxxvii. 24, 25). But since the blessings promised to David are only realised in Christ, the reference to Christ is perfectly clear if we take it in the historical sense, and that is most natural in this place.

2. "For as the rain cometh down," etc. The meaning of this beautiful illustration is clear enough. Its connection is not so clear. Is it not a reference to the "sure mercies of

David"? It is amazing that God should pardon, it is amazing also that joy and peace should again follow those who had "gone astray" in sin. But God has promised; His word has gone forth like the dew; it will surely prosper even in so great a mission as this.

"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money"—well may Isaiah be called the *evangelical* prophet. Where in the New Testament itself will you find a clearer gospel invitation than this? Even the searching cry of our Lord on the great day of the feast, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink," what is it more than this? It is simply Isaiah's call; its unique and moving power being due to no greater freeness or breadth in the call itself, but to the Person who now uttered it. "Come unto

me," said Isaiah; but he spoke in the name of another; "Come unto me," echoed Jesus the Christ, and that day Isaiah's Scripture was fulfilled in their ears.

Isaiah is the gospel prophet. And what are the marks of a gospel? These three: propitiation, pardon, purity. In the last lesson (Isa. liii.) we had the propitiation, the putting of One in the place of others, the making *Him* to be sin for *us*. In this lesson we have the other two, the pardon and the purity. The assurance of pardon is given in vers. 6-9, beginning "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found." The promise of purity goes from ver. 10 to the end of the chapter. But these two are preceded by the invitation itself in vers. 1 to 5.

1. *The Invitation.*—Remember that we have heard that the Lord hath laid on *Him* the iniquity of us all. Naturally, therefore, the next thing is the call to come and enjoy what He has purchased for us. And the two points to notice about the call are (1) its breadth—"Ho, *every one* that thirsteth;" and (2) its freeness—"without money and without price." And they are just the two things which a true gospel call must have, for (1) "*all* we like sheep have gone astray," and (2) we "have nothing to pay" and need "frank" forgiveness.

2. *Pardon.*—In the end of the invitation something was said of the excellence of that to which it called us; "good," "fatness," "glory" being the words used. Now it is particularly described. It is pardon, and then it is purity. It is pardon first. It is always pardon first in every gospel invitation. There is nothing we have so nearly forgotten in these days of ours. And pardon is a very great thing. It demands something from us; not money, not price, but seeking, calling, repenting. And it demands something of God. Indeed it demands so much of God that it is the one marvellous thing in the universe that God can pardon at all. When we see what it means, we can scarcely believe it. Ah, we find it so hard to forgive our little debts. But my "ways are not your ways," saith the Lord.

3. *Purity.*—After pardon comes purity. It never comes before; it never fails to come after. Perhaps purity is not the best name for it, for that word has a taint of the earth about it. Here it is called joy—"ye shall go out with joy" (ver. 12), and peace—"and be led forth with peace." It is described as service, the rooting out of briars and the planting of myrtles in their place, whereby the very face of nature shares our joy, the hills break forth into singing, and the trees of the field clap their hands.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—"Waters . . . wine and milk" (ver. 1). It is related by one who had experienced the horrors of the great African desert, that the thirst which had

absorbed all other feelings while it raged, was no sooner slaked than the feeling of hunger was revived in tenfold violence. So after the refreshing draught at conversion there must come the instruction in the truth, the feeding on the sincere milk of the Word.—J. A. ALEXANDER.

2. "He will abundantly pardon" (ver. 7). The penitent Levites, of whom we read in the Book of Nehemiah, thus spoke to God: "Thou art a *God of pardons*, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness." God is characterised, not only as a pardoning God, but as a God of pardons—possessed as it were of a great store, an abundant supply of pardons.—JAMES MORISON.

3. "My word shall not return unto me void" (ver. 11). When that eminent and successful missionary, Dr. Morrison, some fifty years ago, was about to sail to China, the kind-hearted but unbelieving merchant who had offered him a passage in one of his vessels, with good-humoured raillery, said to him: "And so you really expect to make an impression upon the Chinese Empire." "No, sir, but I expect that God will," was the calm and confident response.—W. G. T. SHEDD.

4. A New Year wish.

"Instead of the brier" (ver. 13).

"Thou shalt find the Canaanite in the land—

I shall not wish that it were not so;

It is good that the seed should be sown by thy hand

Where the briars were wont to grow.

Of all good wishes it is the best—

Best use for life and best cure for pain—

That thy hands should toil for another's rest,

And plant for another's gain."

GEORGE MATHESON.

II.

Jeremiah xxxi. 27-37.

THE NEW COVENANT.

1. "I will sow the house of Israel with the seed of man" (ver. 27). This is a poetical way of expressing the rapidity with which the people will multiply. They will spring up like the corn.

2. "The fathers have eaten a sour grape [should be *sour grapes*, the word is collective], and the children's teeth are set on age" (ver. 29). This is a current proverb; Ezekiel quotes it also (xviii. 2). It was used to deny responsibility for sin. And it was quoted as a kind of despairing sentence—"What is the use of our struggling to do well, we suffer for our father's sins?" In the New Covenant, says the prophet, goodness will be so universal that there will be no hereditary taint possible,—if a man suffers, it will be seen that he suffers directly for his own sin.

3. "The ordinances of the moon"—that is, the established arrangements whereby the moon rises and shines and sets with unvarying regularity.

"THE New Covenant" is the title of our lesson. And although, strictly speaking, the story of the New Covenant is told within four verses (31-34), the title is quite correct. For the rest of this

IV.

Jeremiah xxxvii. 11-21.

JEREMIAH PERSECUTED.

1. "To separate himself thence in the midst of the people" (ver. 12). The translation is difficult. This is barely sense. The only possible rendering is, "To claim his share hence in the midst of the people." When Nebuchadnezzar left Jerusalem, Jeremiah seems to have tried to go home to Anathoth in Benjamin along with others to claim, perhaps, his share of the produce of the priests' lands there.

2. "The gate of Benjamin" (ver. 13) is the gate which led out of Jerusalem in the direction of Benjamin.

3. "The cabins"—the cells.

4. "The court of the prison"—where Jeremiah had more liberty, and was better treated.

LET us see how the history stands. Many events have occurred since our last lesson, though it was only in the previous chapter, for the prophecies of Jeremiah are not in order of time. A new king is on the throne of Judah; he is known by the name of Zedekiah. But before he became king he was called Mattaniah, which means "Jehovah's gift." Who changed his name to Zedekiah, "the righteousness of Jehovah?" It may be, as it has been suggested, that when Nebuchadnezzar raised him to the throne, Mattaniah swore "by the righteousness of Jehovah" that he would be faithful to the King of Babylon; and at once Nebuchadnezzar seized the word, and said: "Then let your name henceforth be Zedekiah, Jehovah's righteousness."

But Zedekiah was false to his name. He rebelled against the King of Babylon, who had put him on the throne, and in so doing he rebelled against the word of God as spoken by His prophet Jeremiah. So Nebuchadnezzar came up against Jerusalem, and besieged it with a great army. Soon Zedekiah and all the inhabitants were in great straits. But a moment of relief came. Nebuchadnezzar raised the siege, and went forth to do battle with the King of Egypt. It was then that Jeremiah tried to leave Jerusalem, that he might go forth to his home in Anathoth, which belonged to the tribe of Benjamin. But he was seized at the gate of the city, charged with trying to escape to the Babylonians, and was unjustly put in prison.

While Jeremiah remained in prison "many days," Nebuchadnezzar defeated the King of Egypt, and returned to the siege of Jerusalem. The siege

lasted long, the people were in danger of starvation, and Zedekiah was in great fear. Then he sent for Jeremiah, and said: "Is there any word from the Lord?" And Jeremiah answered him at once, and very plainly: "There is; for thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon."

Now, as we have two men brought prominently forward in this lesson, we may look at them—Jeremiah the prophet, and Zedekiah the king. We are told that Jeremiah was very reluctant to be made a prophet; but, having undertaken that as his life-work, how faithful he is! What a reply was this he made the king, and he knew the danger of it! Zedekiah was not reluctant to be made king; no doubt he was very glad. But he was false to his promises. He is a weak man, but not vindictive, and with some good points; his great defect is *want of faith in God*.

And this is the great truth in our lesson—"Have faith in God." This was the secret of Jeremiah's fearlessness. Jehovah had said to him, "I am with thee, to deliver thee" (it is the golden text), and Jeremiah kept that saying in mind. He believed (he lived by) that word, and it was righteousness to him. Zedekiah's very name was "Jehovah's righteousness," but he did not believe in Jehovah's righteousness. He wanted God to be on his side, but he would not go over to the side of God.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—1. "Put him in prison" (ver. 15). When Henry Burton, two centuries ago, was persecuted for the name of Christ and put in prison, "I found," he said, "the comforts of my God in the Fleet Prison exceedingly, it being the first time of my being a prisoner."

2. "Is there any word from the Lord?" (ver. 17). When death is thundering at the door the scoffer takes down the Bible from the shelf, covered as it is with dust so thickly that in letters of startling distinctness you can, if you like, write the word "damnation" on the cover—he takes it down and brushes the dust away. It was a different matter when death was at a distance; but when death is knocking at the door, he wants to know what the word of Jehovah is.—JAMES PATERSON.

3. "Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon" (ver. 17). And by and by there was a breach in the walls, and Zedekiah was taken before the King of Babylon. Then he saw his two sons put to death before his eyes; then they came to him and put his eyes out,—he was only thirty-two years of age,—then they loaded him with fetters and condemned him to this awful imprisonment for life. And the sting of the scorpion in his torment was the memory of what might have been had he only obeyed the voice of the Lord.