

The Sunday School

The International Lessons for July.

I.

July 6.—Luke xiii. 10-17.

Lawful Work on the Sabbath.

1. "A spirit of infirmity" (ver. 11). The expression is a peculiar one, at least according to our ways of thinking. It can be understood only in the light of Christ's words: "This woman, whom Satan hath bound" (ver. 16). All disease, even such bodily infirmity as curvature of the spine, is the work of the spirit of evil.

2. "Thou hypocrite" (ver. 15). The Greek word meant originally an actor on the stage, hence any one who *acts* a part in life. The best reading has "hypocrites," so that Christ regarded the conduct of the ruler as a specimen of Pharisaic conduct generally.

It is plain that the reason why this miracle has been related, is its happening to be wrought on the Sabbath, and giving occasion to Christ's stern rebuke of the Pharisees, whereby it became a step in His journey towards the cross. But we may notice, in passing, the evidence it once more affords of Jesus' tender heart. "When Jesus saw her"—the mere sight of suffering was enough to call forth the wish and the power to heal. There is no mention of faith on the woman's part.

And this at once leads us into the great lesson of the story. The Sabbath was instituted for man's good by a wise and tender-hearted God. But the Pharisees had turned it into one of the most effective weapons of cruelty and oppression. Unless you knew intimately the minute rules which they had devised to secure, as they said, its sanctity, you had no chance of heaven. "This people which knoweth not the law is accursed." It was simply impossible for a working man to know them, or knowing them, to keep them. This was, accordingly, made the test of goodness; for was it not so easily applied, and did it not tell so much in favour of the Pharisee? The good man was he who kept the *traditions of the elders*—these minute regulations which had been woven round the law of Moses: the sinner was he who kept them not. Moral goodness was clean forgotten.

We need not wonder, therefore, at the consciences which these men kept. The Sabbath, though made *for* man, was used *against* him, to his very undoing; but its rules could be relaxed when it became a question of property. A man might die, but, for a little Sabbath work, an ox must not go thirsty. Pharisaic righteousness, which really meant strict Sabbath observance, was not at all out of keeping with deceit, lying, and judicial murder—of all of which our dear Lord was Himself made the victim.

A good modern illustration is found in a conversation (from *Church Bells*) in which a bus driver remarks that his horses are changed frequently, while he has to continue the journey all the long day, and every day; because if a horse gets done another costs money, but if a driver gets done another is found for nothing.

II.

July 13.—Luke xiv. 15-24.

The Great Supper.

1. "Sent his servant at supper-time." They say that this is the regular custom in the East. First the invitation some time before, and then a messenger sent at the time to remind those invited.

2. "Have me excused," *i.e.* hold me excused, consider me as having been excused. It is polite enough, but it is a refusal.

3. "Being angry." In the face of a great many clear passages of Scripture, which assert God's anger as a terrible fact, there are those who say that He cannot be angry, that "the alteration is in us, not Him." Read, if possible, Dr. Simon's most valuable discussion of the subject in *The Redemption of Man*, chap. v.

This interesting parable, combined of wrath and mercy like God Himself, sprang out of an explanation made by one of the guests at a supper where Christ was present: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" As a saying, it is unexceptionable. We find it in almost identical words in Rev. xix. 9: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb." But it is evident that this man was merely giving utterance to a pious remark. He was not a true disciple of Jesus, and had probably no intention of becoming one; so *he* was one who would never eat bread in the kingdom of God, since he was determined not to accept the invitation to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

So Christ told the parable to warn such as this seemingly pious man, that the only way to enter the kingdom of God is by trustful obedience as a little child, by taking up the cross and following Jesus. Now the persons who would be expected to be the first to do this, the Jews and Jewish rulers then, and the learned and well-to-do everywhere, are just the persons who, as a rule, will not do it. They have excuses in abundance, they are polite enough—but they will not enter the kingdom of God as a little child. It is their very respectability that keeps them back. The parable had many an illustration in Christ's life. The "woman that was a sinner" may be compared to those who came from the streets and lanes. Simon, the Pharisee, was one of the earliest bidden guests. So also the first two chapters of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians is an expansion and explanation of the parable. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." And there are many, many illustrations to be had amongst us still.

III.

July 20.—Luke xiv. 25-33.

Taking up the Cross.

This is a most difficult lesson, difficult for us all to learn, difficult for the children even to understand. As they read it, some explanations might be made.

1. "And hate not his father," etc. By this word *hate* a

real fact is expressed in a very striking way. It does not mean "love less," nor "hate by comparison," both of which miss the point. It means literally *hate*. But when? When parents, or wife, or children represent the spirit of evil—Satan and his children. When a father or a wife stands up in antagonism to the kingdom of God, and does "the works of their father the devil," then, and in that proportion, they, as children of the devil, must be hated. Compromise with evil there can be none on the part of a follower of Jesus. However hard to the natural man, sin must be hated in all its manifestations.

2. "Bear His cross and come after me." The illustration is a very forcible one. It is taken from the custom of compelling a condemned criminal to carry his own cross to the place of crucifixion.

The great subject is the gravity of the choice which a follower of Christ makes. Many of our Lord's own immediate followers were very light-hearted and easy-minded in their religion. They followed because they were kept in food for nothing (or hoped to be): "Verily I say unto you, ye seek me . . . because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled." So it is said, and no doubt with truth, that some modern converts have even "bread and butter" converts. Others followed from ambitious hopes of future greatness; even Salome's sons had thoughts of this kind.

Jesus tells them that the true follower is he who is prepared to suffer for the cause in person and in purse. He must be ready to face opposition even on the part of those by nature dearest; he must even be prepared to take the position of an antagonist himself. "He that hateth not," etc. Take this illustration (*Wesleyan Methodist S.S. Magazine*): Young Charrington was the son of a wealthy brewer, and was made a partner in the prosperous firm. After his conversion he began to work among the East-end poor, and learned to trace much of their misery to the beer shops. One night, as he passed to his work, sad at heart, his eye was drawn to a beer shop, over which hung the sign, "Charrington & Co.'s Entire." That ended Frederick Charrington's connection with the firm. And as his heart was filled with love for perishing souls, he must have "hated" his father in the proportion that he represented that which wrought their daily ruin.

Thus he who becomes a Christian takes a serious step. Let him count the cost. Some, like the foolish builder or the foolish general, plunge recklessly into it; and "in times of persecution fall away."

But where is there not a cross? "The way of transgressors is hard"; whereas "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." We find it so, because of love.

IV.

July 27.—Luke xv. 1-10.

Lost and Found.

Two beautiful parables with one meaning, and there is a lovellier still to come.

1. "In the wilderness." The whole flock is in the wilderness, where there is sometimes "much grass" (John vi. 10). But one of the flock has strayed from the rest and

been caught in some narrow cleft or rocky trap whence it cannot escape without aid.

2. "Just persons which need no repentance"—who are *they*? Even to a Nicodemus, Jesus said, "Ye must be born again." And Paul, "A Hebrew of the Hebrews," "touching the righteousness that is in the law blameless," needed and had repentance. Farrar says that our Lord "uses the description with a holy irony." But that unwelcome word is unnecessary. He simply takes the Pharisees at their own estimate of themselves, as He does again and again, and shows them that even then they are wrong, faulty, sinful, and, finally, in need of repentance like the rest.

Now, what is the point of these parables? It is the *joy* of God over a repentant sinner in contrast with the grumbling sulkiness of the Pharisees. The Pharisees classed all those who were really open sinners, and those who were merely ignorant or careless of the traditions and ceremonies, together as "sinners," and they believed that there was *no hope for any one of them*. (See the review of Mr. Ross' book in THE EXPOSITORY TIMES for May.) So they grumbled that Jesus, who was in their view a Pharisee, should eat with them or show them any regard. But Jesus came to call, not the righteous (supposing that there were any), but sinners. Therefore His very place was with those who were recognised as sinners by everybody. "They that are whole need not the physician, but they that are sick."

He showed the Pharisees by means of these two parables that they were ready enough to rejoice when a part of their property was recovered, just as they were ready to break their Sabbath rules for the sake of their horses, though they would not do so for the sake of their fellow-men.

And then, finally, He took the very highest ground, and boldly asserted that His conduct was in harmony with God's. Here is one of the most striking, because unexpected, proofs of Christ's divine nature. Yes, "He made Himself equal with God," claiming to know the mind of God infallibly.

Of the two parables, there is no doubt that the first will appeal more easily and more forcibly to the children. It can be used with great naturalness and effect. The wretched forlorn sheep, which never is happy when alone; its utter helplessness and sure destruction; then the shepherd's care, his love for every single one of the flock, and the active energy of his love. It is Jesus Himself. Read John x. Sing—"There were ninety and nine."

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PAPERS AND PRIZES.

REPORT FOR JUNE.

Age under eighteen.

1. John M. Small, 1 Charteris Street, Perth.
Next in Order of Merit.—M. B., M. M., A. C. M.

Age under thirteen.

1. Ernest James Pike, 23 Teviotdale Pl., Stockbridge, Edin.
Next in Order of Merit.—C. C. G., H. K., F. H. T. G.

This competition will be resumed after the holidays.