

so? They had learned one thing, at least—that though God hated sin, and had to punish terribly, yet He was always longing to see them repent and be forgiven.

(2.) THE PROPHET.—Repeat again the "TWOFOLD LESSON." What always came after the "crying unto the Lord"? A deliverer. Was it so now? Who was sent? Why not deliverer at once sent? Because God sends not always what we *wish*, but what we *need*. Perhaps people not yet ready—not sorry enough for their sin. Not see their sin at all, only their misery. What was the message? "Look how good God has been to you, and how often you have disappointed Him." Just what everyone should say who is not living for God. "How good God has been to me, made me, preserved me, loved me, died for me, invited me to be His child, and enter into His heaven. And yet I have been disappointing Him continually. What a shame!"

(3.) THE DELIVERER.—But God was preparing deliverer, too. Amongst the poor, trampled Israelites was one man, a brave soldier (*v.* 12), whose heart was very sore for the troubles of his people. His name? He had to flee like the rest, and try to hide what he could of his harvest. Down hidden in the wine-press he was threshing his father's wheat, and brooding over his people's misery (*see v.* 13). Suddenly he is conscious of a mysterious presence under the oak before him. Strange salutation. "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." "O how can the Lord be with us? He has cast us off." Poor, hopeless, despondent Gideon, with the black, miserable outlook for his nation before him. And then comes thrilling through him the rousing word of the Lord: "Go in this thy might. Thou shalt save Israel. Have not I sent thee?" In his wonder and humility he pleads: "How shall I save?" Like Moses (*Ex. iii.* 11). And in reply gets the word which was such a source of courage to Moses, to Joshua, to all who have ever done great things for God: "Certainly I will be with thee." You remember what great things Joshua did in the strength of that promise. A man can do almost anything if he feels that God is with him—that he is on the side of God and right.

(4.) THE REFORMER.—Soon Gideon had need of this help and encouragement. The trouble had come on Israel by reason of their idolatry. "You must be a Reformer first," said God. "And you must begin at home. Your own town has an altar of Baal, the filthy god of the Canaanites. It is in the high rock in your own father's grounds. Your own family worship it. That must be dashed down at once." Think of the daring needed for that in a town full of idolaters. Why, they would tear a man in pieces if he dared to touch it. Did Gideon hesitate? Did he know the danger of it? What gave this courage to the man who had to hide in a wine-press a few days before? Repeat again God's promise to him. Ah, that was the secret. And so cautiously, but fearlessly **he laid his plans**: The people, as usual, went to their beds that

night without a suspicion: Next morning a startling sight on the hill. The whole town gaze in horror. Then wild uproar, shouts, and yells of rage in the streets. "Our altar is thrown down, our idol is broken and burned in the fire. Who has dared to commit this awful thing in our town?" Like the day when Luther burned the Papal Bull. Like the night of the placards in French Huguenot story. In the morning through every town in France every man as he went out saw a staring placard attacking the corruption of the Church. Fierce indignation and stern search for the perpetrators. So in Abiezer. Backward and forward surged the gathering crowd. Who hath done this thing? Then with a shout they rushed towards the house of Joash. "Gideon thy son, hath broken down the altar of our god. Bring him out, bring him out, that he may die for his crime." You remember the clever, quiet reply of old Joash? (*v.* 31). Yes, just the argument against all idolatry to-day. If he be a god, let him plead for himself. He who could not save himself from Gideon, how can he save anybody else?

(5.) THE DELIVERER.—Gideon nearly paid with his life for his boldness in reform. But he dared it all for the sake of God and righteousness. And now there is a still more daring deed to be done. It is just the harvest time, when the fierce Midianites crowd in like locusts to carry off the poor farmer's crops. As usual, they come in their insolent pride, expecting the people to run off to their hiding-holes. Ah, but there is a change! The power of God's strength, the enthusiasm for heroic deeds, has come strongly upon Gideon. Already he has startled the whole country around by his daring attack on the altar. Now they hear strange, almost incredible rumours. A brave stand is to be made. The trumpet of Gideon is ringing out through the hills, and all Abiezer is gathering after him! The bravery of one man roused the bravery of many. And, as in the days of Deborah, the enthusiasm spread. Through all the country round sped the messengers of the chief, through Manasseh, through Asher, through Zebulun, and Naphtali. Oh, the delight and eagerness of the people. God with us again! A deliverer again! Every day his numbers increased, until at last, with an army of 32,000 men at his back, he set out to deliver his country from the foe. We shall see in next Lesson the extraordinary way in which nearly all that great army melted away without striking a blow.

We have now to close our Lesson by reminding ourselves again of the secret of the wonderful power that had come to Gideon. Why could he dare to risk his life in destroying the idol? Because he knew God was with him. Why did his heart swell with courage and enthusiasm and willingness to sacrifice all for the sake of his people? Because God was with him. Remember that is the one great secret of strength. That is the secret of power in every man who has accomplished wonders for God. Can we have that strength too? How can we get it? How shall we use it when we do get it? In living brave, true lives for God. In being in very deed Christ's faithful soldiers and servants to our lives' end.

LESSON V.

Gideon—The Sword of the Lord.

JUDGES VII.

"There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few."

Recapitulate briefly last Lesson. Try to get children's feelings roused to pity for the down-trodden Israelites, in sympathy with the heroic purpose of Gideon. His heart is beating high with hope. "God is with me. His angel has been sent to me. The signs I prayed for have been granted me. Now I am going to do great things for God and for my people—break down all altars, reform religion, crush the pride of the cruel chiefs of Midian. I am, by the help of God, to bring great blessing to my native land!"

Then read the chapter quickly through, dividing it into sections. Section 1. First testing (*vs.* 1-4). Section 2. Second testing (*vs.* 4-9). Section 3. Gideon's sign (*vs.* 9-15). Section 4. The battle of Jezreel (*vs.* 15 to end). Name the sections, and watch carefully to keep up the interest by a passing remark as they read.

(1.) Read Sections 1 and 2 taken together. Picture Gideon—proud, glad, enthusiastic: a few months ago so insignificant—hiding from Midian, and now a great leader, with 32,000 behind him, and the army of the oppressor on the valley before him. Think of a man at such a time being told, Your great army must disband without striking a blow. Surely it must have startled him. Yet he felt that God must be right.

Why was army reduced? (*v.* 2.) Yes, they must be made to feel that they were only God's instruments—this is what must rouse awe, and wonder, and trust, and thanksgiving in the heart of the nation. What was first test? How many went? How many remained? Seemed a very small army now to meet the countless hosts of Midian. How is their vast number described? (*v.* 12.) Yet even 10,000 too many. What was the next test? How would this test them so as to keep the best? Picture the host of Midian watching the strange manoeuvres. See 22,000 throw down arms and go home. See 10,000 drawn up on bank of stream. Suddenly 9,700 throw themselves on their faces, completely off guard—no self-control, no watchfulness—exposing themselves perhaps to a quick charge of Midian from behind. But here and there along the lines a man stood, steady, restrained, on his guard, stooping quickly to dip his hand for water, and rising alert in his place again. How many such? Yes in the whole army there were but 300 heroes of courage, and self-denial, and watchfulness fit for God's great work. What heroes they were! They had to stand still before the countless hosts of the enemy, and see 9,700 march away. And these 300 had to dare all for God. (Read Tennyson's *Charge of Light Brigade*.) By these 300 choice men God said he would deliver Israel? Why were these special men chosen for God's work? Was it chance? Was there any reason? They were the best, choicest, fittest, most heroic, and, therefore, God used them. Which will do best work for God—100 careless, half-hearted, or ten enthusiastic, out-and-out Christians, eager to sacrifice everything for God and right?

(2.) Now let us see what these chosen men had to do. How anxious Gideon and they when they stood alone, only 300 against many thousands. What was their comfort? They had obeyed God, and, therefore, they could trust Him to take care of them. Did God give further encouragement? Picture the sleeping hosts, the active Israelite chief creeping cautiously from rock to rock into their midst. The dream about the cake of barley bread rolling on and overthrowing the tent. Meaning? Barley bread, the cheap bread of the poor, meant Gideon and his 300; they seemed such a contemptible thing, like a loaf of the common brown bread, scorned by the proud Arabs. How glad Gideon was. It was God's sign to him. What did he do at once? (v. 15.) Worshipped and thanked God, and went back full of hope to the soldiers.

Now see the clever stratagem. The 300 are prepared. Torches covered by a little jar in one hand, and in the other a trumpet. Watch them stealthily surrounding the sleeping army—all perfectly still—all perfectly dark. Now intense excitement—wait for signal. Suddenly Gideon's trumpet rings out, and with one blow his pitcher is smashed. In an instant 300 blows smash 300 pitchers, and 300 trumpets ring out in the night, and 300 voices in every direction shout in fierce excitement the war-cry of their leader—"For the Lord and for Gideon!" What next? Did the 300 fight? (v. 21.) No. They stood still. They had trusted God. They had risked their lives. And now God justified their trust. In frenzied panic the sleepers sprang up. The darkness all around them was full of sounding trumpets, and flashing lights, and ringing war-cries. There was a terrified stampede. Every man slashed all round him. Friends fought with friends, and all that could flee fled for their lives. And so the terrible misery of Israel was removed, and the fierce, cruel oppressor had his power broken for ever. And all this was done by God. But done by means of the 300 heroes whom He had specially tested and chosen to accomplish this great deliverance.

(3.) Does God want any great work done in the world to-day? Does any testing like that of Gideon's men take place in the world to-day? Yes, always. Every day. Are you surprised at this? Think of any great work for God in the world. Just look at beginning of Christianity. How many followed Christ to hear Him? He had twice to feed them—how many? Yes, many thousands followed Him. What did He want followers to do? To make the world better. Were all these fit? No, large numbers got tired and went away, like Gideon's 22,000. Were all the rest earnest enough to do much good? No, he had still to sift them. He picked out seventy disciples to go teaching, and twelve apostles to rouse workers and teachers everywhere. Why were these seventy and twelve especially chosen? Because, like Gideon's 300 they were the fittest, the most earnest.

Look on the world to-day. Christ is still wanting great work to be done—wanting hero soldiers to fight His enemies of drunkenness,

and dishonesty, and lying, and sin of every kind. He wants people to give up friends and home for sake of His poor heathen children. How many in this Sunday school and parish are pledged to be His soldiers? All. See Baptismal Service, "to be Christ's faithful soldier and servant to his life's end." But are all earnest and loyal and fit to do God's work, to conquer sin in the world, and make the world better, purer, happier? No. First the large number who don't care at all about God's work, like Gideon's 22,000. Then there remain those who *do* care, but not *very* earnestly. They say their prayers each day, and come to church and Sunday school, but do not think much about the brave, true life that God looks for. They are not loving God and right *very* much. They are not fighting *hard* for Christ's sake against temper and laziness, etc. They are like the 10,000 remaining to Gideon. Do they do anything to make world better? Yes, a little. But are they fit to do much? Suppose a school where carelessness and lying and bad words go on. God wants it put right. Can He use them? Not much. Whom does He use? The few boys or girls who are earnest, who are longing to do right, and to serve and please God—the few who are willing to bear being unpopular and being laughed at by companions for the sake of God. They are like Gideon's 300, whom God chose to do great things for Him. *E.g.*, one boy who has the courage to kneel at his prayers has shamed a whole roomful at school to do it. Pray to God to make you fit to do great things for Him, not by talking or boasting or fault-finding, but by living a brave, true, faithful life yourself, and thus helping others in the path to right. And thus you will be training yourself to do when you get bigger, great, good work in the world for God.

LESSON VI.

Jephthah—Ignorance of God.

JUDGES XI:

"Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself."

Divide the chapter for better comprehension into three sections: 1. The Coming of Jephthah (vs. 1-12). 2. The Controversy with Ammon (vs. 13-20). 3. Jephthah's Vow (vs. 29-40).

Read Section 1: In order to keep up the connection with the "TWOFOLD LESSON," look back to ch. x., and read vs. 6, 7, 15. Here we have same old story—Sinning, Punishment, Repenting, Deliverance. Who were oppressors? Who the new deliverer? What do you think of him? Was he as good as Gideon? See ch. viii. 23. Now read xi. 9. One thought only of his country's good; the other thought much of his own position and advantage. But Jephthah had had a hard life: not as easy for him to be good

and unselfish: Driven out of his home when young, a fugitive, an exile, a leader of a band of robbers. Ought he to be judged as sharply as we? God makes allowances for men's disadvantages. So, we see, his tribe, who had turned him out, came pleading to him again. And he came back to lead Israel. And God accepted him, and helped him to conquer. (See *v.* 29.)

(2.) Read Section 2, *vv.* 12-29. Did he at once begin to fight? What did he do? Do you think it was a good plan to begin by remonstrating? Do you remember our Lord's advice, "Tell him his fault between thee and him alone"? Did you ever know of a quarrel between two boys or two girls, or two families? Do you think if they had talked it over together in a friendly way, and tried to find out each other's feelings, it would have been better? In disagreement with another, we should always try to be very fair with him. Try to "put yourself in his place." Try to understand him. Say to him, "I don't want to be unfair or unkind; please tell me exactly where you think I am wrong; let us try to understand each other." One very good rule is: always try to look for the faults in yourself, and to look for excuses for the other. If both would do that, God would be pleased, and the quarrel would soon be ended. However, in Jephthah's case, the two parties could not agree, and so had to fight, and Jephthah and his men conquered by the help of God.

(3.) Jephthah's Vow. Read *vv.* 29-40. We saw that Jephthah was not a very good man. Is not *v.* 29 a strange one, then? Explain here that the spirit of the Lord bestows various gifts, according to men's natural differences, and according to the needs of the men or of their times. The spirit of holiness, of love, of understanding, and of common-sense. (See Whitsuntide Collect for right judgment as the gift of the Holy Ghost.) Here the gift seems especially the gift of energy and power for his great work. See this more fully in Samson afterwards. True, every help from God's Spirit makes men better and nobler. But every help from Him does not make them absolutely good and noble at once. A man may be rash or foolish or mistaken, or even weak in yielding to temptation, and yet may be receiving help from the Spirit of the Lord. No doubt, Jephthah was made a braver and a stronger chieftain, and a better man, by the help of God's Spirit; but many faults still remained in him. What a strange ignorance of God in his famous vow!

What is a vow? What was his vow? (*vv.* 30-31.) What did it mean? That he would offer up a human sacrifice to God. Was it right to do that? Would God like it? No! it would be horrible to God. But poor Jephthah did not know that. He had been an exile in Syria—a robber chief—and had the usual superstition of Syria about human sacrifices. The people about him offered up their children to Moloch, their god, when they wanted victory. The Carthaginians sacrificed a boy yearly. See 2 Kings iii. 27, when King of Moab did it. See Balak's cry, Micah (vi. 7). They

thought like the poor heathen in India to-day. That is the worst of living amongst people who do not know or worship God. Take care of being much with godless people, else you will grow like them.

Would it be right for you to make such a vow? If you had made it, would it be right to keep it? No. It is a sin to break a vow; but it would be a worse sin to keep it after seeing that it was very wrong. But Jephthah did not see that it was very wrong. Only that it was very terrible and very painful to fulfil. He thought that God would approve of it. What do you think he should be blamed for? For his ignorance of God's character, in thinking that would please Him. He should have known better, and he could have known if he had not neglected God's teaching.

Now after the vow he goes to battle. Does he conquer? You know what happens after a great victory. Illuminations, rejoicings, crowds, and shoutings and music to welcome the conquerors. What delight and pride in the general's home, that all the nation were praising and thanking him. Only one young girl there, his only daughter—so glad, so proud—so fond of her father! She was watching for him, all unconscious of evil. The moment she saw him, out she rushed, dancing with joy, and sounding her song of triumph and of welcome. Oh, the pity of it. Can't you imagine the look of horror and agony in his eyes, as he started back from her? Oh, alas, alas; my daughter. I have vowed to the Lord, and I cannot go back!" What a grand, heroic girl she was! Did she cry or scream, or beg to be let off? Not she! Poor ignorant girl, she, too, thought that God would require the vow to be kept. "Father," she said, "if you have vowed to the Lord, and the Lord has saved our people from the oppressor, keep your vow. I am willing to die for my country, and my father, and my God". Read Byron's poem:—

"If my country, my God, oh, my sire,
Demand that thy daughter expire."

And so she went out to die, this poor ignorant, loving, loyal Jewish girl. Was she right in thinking that God desired it? No. Human sacrifice was hateful to God. But, poor girl, she meant to do God's will, and only did in mistake that which was not God's will. Do you think God was pleased with her? I am sure He was. It was horrible, but it was grand. It was heroic self-sacrifice. And self-sacrifice with a righteous motive is very dear to the heart of God, however ignorant or mistaken it may be. It is the very essence of God's own nature, unselfishness—bearing and suffering for the sake of others. What was the grandest example of it in the whole world? Yes, when the blessed Saviour "for us men and for our salvation" came down from heaven and died on Calvary. Be thankful that you know more about God than this poor ignorant maiden; but be very sure that you can do no higher thing in His sight than to be utterly unselfish, to be willing to sacrifice everything for the sake of God and your brethren.

LESSON VII.

Samson—Responsibility.

JUDGES XIII : *vv.* 1-8, 24, 25, and XIV.

(1.) Every child repeat main lesson of Book of Judges. (Two lines on page 47.)

This chapter begins by telling of? What as usual followed the sin? Punishment. What nations already used for punishment? What nation now? *Describe Philistines, big, heavy, slow-witted, the butt of Israelites, etc. Try to make them stand out distinct and interesting.* Things again in bad state. Again God pities. How shown? A godly mother receives warning that son shall be born to play a great part in his people's history. What? (*v.* 5.) Tell me of any great promise like this. (Abraham and Sarah, Hannah, Elizabeth, Virgin Mary.) He must be trained for this great future. How? What is a Nazirite? (*Numb:* vi. 2. One separated or dedicated unto the Lord.) What were his vows? Distinguish from Nazarene. Is not it a lovely thought of the boy's life? (*v.* 24.) The child grew, and the Lord blessed him. Poor Samson; what a pity that he should waste the blessing of God!

Is it not a solemn thing to be dedicated like Samson to a great work? Has anything like it been done to you? (Impress very solemnly the importance of Baptism. Repeat the words of dedication. "We sign him with sign of the cross in token," etc.) That is your dedication. What are your vows? Has God any great work for you as for Samson? Any enemies to fight? Temper, lying, disobedience, etc. Anyone to be helped or delivered by you? Weak comrades tempted to carelessness, lying, drunkenness, etc. You to be God's Samson. Careless people sometimes excuse themselves, saying, "Not done any harm in the world." Is that a fair excuse? Why? Because we are vowed *to do good*—to be Christ's soldiers—to fight His battles—to make the world better and happier. He who is not doing that is an idler, a deserter.

(2.) Do you think those parents religious people? Were they anxious to rear up the boy aright? (*v.* 8). Their great aim for the boy, not that he should be rich and comfortable, and have an easy situation, but that he should be good and brave, and able to do God's work, to fight and, if necessary, die for his country and his God. What do you think should be the chief aim of parents for children? What should be the chief aim of boys and girls? What would you like to be when you grow up? What business or profession? And you? And you? (*Don't be too solemn over this; Don't mind making them laugh. Tell perhaps of own childish aims, and ideals. A little lightness may make following thought more impressive.*) In this future of yours should you like to be rich, happy? Is it wrong to wish this? But what is the highest aim of all about one's future life? To do God's work in the world.

To fight God's enemies. To deliver God's tempted children. To make this poor world brighter, and happier, and better for your being in it. (*In suitable classes the teacher might here speak of the great work of missions. So dear to Christ's heart—so undermanned. Parents straining and striving for every petty post of comfort and gain for their children, and fretting—What to do with our boys? What to do with our girls? And the noblest work on earth waiting for helpers. Ask the children to pray that this Lesson, taught to-day in so many classes, may result in many childish resolves to offer themselves for this work.*) All work may and ought to be holy work. Therefore, pray about your future: "Lord, not so much that I may be rich or great or prosperous, but, above all, that I may be good. May do my duty in that state of life unto which," &c.

(3). Now picture that home, the awe-struck mother brooding over the mysterious future of her boy. Like what other? (Luke ii. 51). How she would pray for him! How proud she would be of his magnificent strength, and his daring deeds in camp of Dan (v. 25). What glorious hopes she would cherish for his future. Ah, children, you don't know how mother's hearts are bound up in their children's future! What lovely, hopeful day-dreams they have for you! Oh, what a shame to disappoint them!

Here is this boy growing up—big boy now, moody, wilful, keeping his outward Nazirite vow, yielding to his impulses in all else—self-will, disobedience. What was first great disappointment to parents? (xiv. 3.) Now a man—going to marry. Not care if pleased God or parents. See his reply (v. 3). What a sad disappointment. The man who was to deliver Israel from brutal Philistines now going to marry into them. There will be no religion now; no godly family life like his father's. His wife would worship Dagon, and rejoice in Dagon's conquests over people of Jehovah. Her sympathies would be all with her own people, the conquerors. She would scorn the poor subject race. What a shame to disappoint his parents so bitterly! What a shame to disappoint God!

Is it possible to disappoint God? Ah, yes, God had designed great things for Samson's future if Samson had not spoiled it. God's plans about the Philistines was not overthrown. Even Samson's marriage over-ruled to further it. How? Wedding feast? Riddle—repeat it, and explain. A great wager on the riddle. Did they guess it? How? Was Samson angry? What did he do? So the Philistines more his enemies than ever. God's purpose not overthrown.

But how sorely Samson suffered all his life for that marriage. Look at the result in one week—a betrayed husband, a deserted wife, discord, strife, bloodshed; afterwards, a lonely, misguided, sinful life, captivity, blindness, violent death. No good, religious wife beside him to help and encourage him to better things. Don't you think when God sent him into the world and blessed him (xiii. 24) He designed something nobler and better for him than

this poor wrecked life? Whose fault was it that he failed? God has good designs for you and me, too. Let us not disappoint Him.

There are other stories of him that we have not time for now. Tell me some briefly—how he killed the lion—set fire to the corn—how he carried off the gates of Gaza on his back; but they seem chiefly done to show off his strength or gratify his resentment. The great gift of strength was not used much for God, or for doing much good to Israel. He was very brave, and merry, and good-natured; but he seems to have quite wasted his opportunities and his gifts.

LESSONS.—(1.) *To be attractive and a favourite is not always a mark of goodness or of being pleasing to God.* Look at Samson—daring, merry-hearted, generous, attractive—a fine, big, good-natured fellow; full of fun; full of courage; dashing into the enemy without stopping to count them; playing mischievous tricks on the thick-headed Philistines; one of these men so attractive to others, who so easily becomes a leader of others. And yet no real character; no deep sense of the duty or religion; no earnest struggle to put the Right before the Pleasant.

Is it a good thing for a boy to be a strong, brave, pleasant, good-natured fellow? (or, in a girl's class—a girl to be bright, merry, handsome, good-natured?) Yes. Makes him a favourite—a leader amongst others. These things are God's good gift to some boys. But we may have all these gifts, and not be a high character. What makes the high character that is pleasing to God? The effort to do the right even when it is unpleasant—putting God, and Right, and Duty first of all. Sometimes a poor, weak, puny, insignificant boy is a higher character than the other. Why? What makes his character higher? He is trying to fight down his temper or his cowardice, and to do what God wants, however hard it be. Yes, what God cares for most of all things in the world is the true, loyal struggle after the Right.

(2.) *Responsibility for God's good gifts.* What gifts had God given to Samson? Size and strength, and influence amongst his companions. Why were they given? To make him fit to do the great work for which he was dedicated. Did he use them for this? No, we shall see next Sunday the sad result. Had he a right to use them as he liked himself? Why? Because they are God's, and given for a special purpose. If a man gave you money to use for him, would you have a right to use it as you liked for yourself? Is our case at all like Samson? Gifts of health, and brains, and perhaps pleasant, attractive disposition, and influence amongst our companions. They make us happier, and God likes that. But may we use them as we like? To do wrong things? To lead weaker boys astray? He who does that will be acting dishonourably, and grieving and disappointing God.

LESSON VIII.

Samson—Failure.

JUDGES XVI. 4 to end.

This should be a most interesting and exciting subject if well handled. Read Milton's *Samson Agonistes*. Few writers have entered so thoroughly into the spirit of this story, and his vivid picturing will add much to the interest.

Pass over the first four verses of the chapter, merely mentioning the incident of the gates. Begin story at *v.* 4. There need be no hesitation about teaching very briefly the story of Delilah's treachery. She is described as a Philistine woman whom Samson loved in the same way perhaps as her whom he had married many years before. Don't tire the children with the application at the close. Try to carry the thought of it all through the Lesson. But if you have really roused and excited them, as you should have done, over the story, there will be need of making the application very short and direct, lest you lose their interest and spoil the lesson.

Recapitulate main lesson of last Sunday, *i. e.*, Responsibility for God's gifts—remind of Samson's waste of them. When a man wastes God's gifts, he will lose them some day. See in Samson's case. We have seen several incidents of his life—the lion—the blazing corn—the gates of Gaza. We passed over a very generous act of self-sacrifice. (Tell briefly *xv.* 9-15.)

(1.) THE TRAITRESS.—To-day we are drawing toward the close of his brave, careless, wasted life. It is a dark, miserable story. As before his marriage, he is again deceived by a Philistine woman whom he loved. Poor foolish Samson trusted her. But she was a traitor, paid by the Philistines to entrap him (*v.* 5). Why not come and attack him openly? Ah! no—they had had enough of that already. Terribly afraid of him. So they bribed her to find out the secret of his strength, and had men hiding in another room to seize him at the fit time. Did he tell her at once? No, told her untruths. What? Bind me with green withs—with new ropes—weave my long hair into the cloth with the shuttle. And at each time when he was tied she cried out what? What happened? Surely he should have known her treachery now? He should have gone away at once. But his will was very weak, though body was strong. He staid on till at last, in a weak, foolish moment, she coaxed his secret from him. What was it? Yes. Then she waited till he was asleep, and then a man, who was hidden, stole softly out and shaved his head. Soon he awoke. What then? (*v.* 20). What an awful, horrible, humiliation! What pain and misery and remorse! What delight to the Philistines to have him in their power! What did they do? They put out his eyes, and carried him off to dungeon in Gaza. Were they still afraid of his strength? (*v.* 21), fetters of brass.

(2.) THE PRISON.—A great holiday in Gaza—shouting, rejoicing, chants of praise, bursts of barbaric music in the streets. A poor captive, blind and chained and miserable, listening in his dungeon; Oh, the agony and disgrace of it all as he thinks about the past—as

he listens to the triumph song : " Praise unto Dagon, our god, who hath delivered our enemy into our hands." (*v.* 23). Imagine the wretched thoughts in his mind—of the old home—of the prayerful parents—of the Nazirite vow and the great gift of God, and the great plans God had for him. Israel's deliverer ! And now the promised deliverer lies blind and chained and grinding all day long at the wretched work of slaves. And God's great work is undone—and Israel is still oppressed. Poor wretched Samson ! don't you think they were bitter thoughts ? And the bitterest thought of all would be, what ? Try and think. Yes. " It is all my own fault ! Oh, what a mad, wicked fool I have been ! " It is a good thing to think that it was his own fault—that he had been a wicked fool ? Yes, when a poor sinner has found out that about himself, he is very near to finding out something very good about God. Perhaps poor Samson, in his lonely sorrow and pain, turned to God in real repentance. If so, would God cast him out ? Did He ever cast a penitent out ?

Did you ever know or hear of people in Samson's state ? Sometimes poor old drunkard—or old sinner in the workhouse, once a healthy and prosperous man, but sinned away God's gifts, like Samson. Perhaps, in his misery, cried to God for forgiveness.

Well, Samson still grinding hard with his hands, and thinking and fretting hard in his soul. Suddenly the door opens—the shouts outside grow louder—a Philistine gaoler enters. " Samson, the lord and chiefs and people have sent for you ; they want to see your strength ; you are to come out and make sport for them." Fancy his fierce indignation. Those stupid Philistines, that used to fly before him in terror, now want to mock him, and make sport of him for their amusement. And he must go. He is blind and chained and weak. They could drag him with chains if he refused. Oh, the depth of shame and misery !

(3.) THE CATASTROPHE.—Try to picture the scene. Great Temple of Dagon on the hillside, thousands of people shouting in triumph as the poor blind giant comes stumbling along with the brass chains on his mighty limbs. What fools those Philistines were to bring him out ! They were probably too drunk to think about it. Hearts were merry, *v.* 25. And they did not know or think of what had happened in the prison. What ? His strength was not in hair or muscles, but in his relation to God : his Nazirite vow broken when hair shaved. Perhaps, in sorrow for his sin and folly, he had now remembered his Nazirite vow to the Lord, and thus his strength returned. Now see great semicircle of seats like an enormous circus, and over it a roof resting on two front pillars, and on the top of it an enormous crowd too. How many ? *v.* 27. All cheering and laughing as Samson was tormented to make sport for them. You have seen a " strong man " performing, lifting weights in his teeth, bending iron bars, &c. Think of Samson like that before Philistines. It was a great triumph for Dagon, their god. They thought that they had now conquered God as well as

Samson: And poor Samson had to feel that he had brought shame on God as well as on himself. Don't you think he would be very miserable? Do you think God cared for or pitied him in his misery? What! even after all his wrong-doing?

Samson seems tired. He is thinking. Ah! he is doing more; he is praying—very humbly, very earnestly. "Oh! Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me *only this once*. I was sent to deliver Israel from these cruel Philistines, and I have shamefully failed. Oh! God, strengthen me *only this once more*. I don't want to escape; I am willing to die; but give me back my strength *this once*." And he turns to the boy that led him. "Lead me to the front pillars to rest myself." Carelessly the crowd watched him. But in a moment their old terror of Samson was roused. See that powerful grasp of the two big pillars. Hear the wild cry, "Let me die with the Philistines!" and then, with a mighty wrench, he has bowed himself forward, and tugged, and rocked, and shaken the huge pillars till they burst from their sockets. One awful crash—mad yells of terror—and Samson and the thousand of his enemies are lying dead together beneath the ruins. "The dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life."

Poor Samson! Are you sorry for him? Whose fault was all the poor spoiled life? God's? Delilah's? No. All his own. What a grand career his might have been with the powers God gave him! What a poor, aimless, wretched, disappointing thing it was. And yet we are sorry for him. Do you think God was sorry? Do you think He forgave him? Certainly, if he repented, and asked to be forgiven. And I think he did. He is mentioned in Heb. xi. as one of the heroes of faith. Oh! God is so good and loving. He intended such good things for Samson, and he disappointed Him. Yet God did not cast him out. When He has intended grand things for you, and you sinfully fail of them, He tries not to cast you out. You can never *then* get the *best* thing which He intended. But He offers the *second best*, and if you fail of that, He offers the *third best*, and so on, as long as there is any hope for one at all. Is it not a shame to disappoint Him when He cares so for our good? How can you escape failing and disappointing Him?

LESSON XI.

Samuel—Lent unto the Lord.

1 SAM. I, II, to v. 11.

"As long as he liveth he shall be lent unto the Lord."

What book of Bible just finished by us? What Judge last Sunday? (Briefly recapitulate.) Are we done with the Judges now? No. Don't know how long this after Samson's time. But still in "the days of the Judges." Reading to day of birth of "the last of the Judges," and the greatest of them all. Name? Yes. He was last of Judges. After him came the Kings. But he was greater than any of the Kings. He was the "King-maker." Remember Earl of Warwick, the "King-maker" in English history? Samuel—like him—raised up Saul, and deposed him, and put David in his place. Both Saul and David revered and feared him. What made him so great and so much revered? Because noble, and unselfish, and good—utterly devoted to God's service, therefore greatly used by God.

Can you see any reason in this chapter why he was so good? The reason that, above all others, has made good men always? Ah! yes—his mother. The greatest blessing in the whole wide world is a mother like Hannah. Sweet, and gentle, and unselfish—willing to give up all that she loves best in the world for the sake of seeing her boy a true servant of God.

(1.) Our story begins at the tabernacle of Shiloh. (See map.) There, after all the wanderings of Israel, the ark of God at last rested in Joshua's days (Josh. xviii. 1), and there it remained up to the time of our story. It contained what? Therefore Shiloh was the great holy place—the great centre for the Church of Israel. Picture to yourselves this holy place on one of the great festival days of the year, like our Easter or Christmas. A vast pilgrimage from all over the land—crowds and crowds gathering in for the great yearly feast-day, to worship before the Lord in Shiloh. Watch them crowding through the gates, men and women, old and young. One family especially. How many? Who? There they go with their holiday clothes in the holiday crowd. But do they look very happy? All? What was Hannah fretting about? Lonely home. No boys and girls running to her to make her glad. Something else? (v. 7.) Yes, Peninnah, a jealous, spiteful woman, mocking at her in her loneliness and sorrow. Evidently not a very happy home. Not God's will to have two wives in a home. But the nations around them had them, and many of the Israelites in those days did not know better. You remember we have seen already how gradually people learned about God's will, and how patiently God waited and bore with them. (See Joshua, Lesson VIII.)

But Hannah has learned where to go in her trouble. All through the time of the sacrificial banquet she had to listen to the cruel

gibes and mockery of Peninnah. They were torture to her; but she seems to have borne them meekly and gently. No doubt, God was training her by such struggles to be a true, noble woman—a mother worthy of bringing up so great a son. That is the good of all trouble, and vexation, and irritation, when borne nobly for sake of God and right. But she can bear it no longer. Her husband tries to comfort her. How? (*v. 8.*) But in vain. She rises from the table and hurries out. Where to? Somebody sitting on the high priest's seat by a pillar as she passes on. Who? Yes. He was the judge and the high priest together. He had to rule the nation and rule the Church; but he could not rule his own family. And the poor old man sat with heavy heart watching the people as they came in, and feeling what sin and discredit to religion were caused by those wicked sons of his, whom he had made clergy of the Church. He could hear them greedily demanding gifts; he could see that there was less reverence for God, and more drunkenness and sin of every kind in those yearly pilgrimages to Shiloh. And he knew the cause. Poor old father, like many another father, breaking his heart about his wicked sons.

Even as he watches he sees a woman hurry in with flushed face and flashing eyes. What does he think? (*v. 13.*) He sees her throw herself down, sobbing before the altar, and raising her eyes to heaven, and moving her lips. "Surely she is drunk," said the old man, and he turns to her angrily, "Get away with your drunkenness; put away thy wine from thee." What a cruel wrong to the poor heart-broken woman, who had cast herself down in the very passion of her sorrow and her longing for God's comfort: "O Lord, remember me, and pity me, and send me a little son, and I will give him up to Thy service all the days of his life." Must not blame the poor high priest too much for his mistake. The poor old man had a sore heart himself—therefore he spoke hastily and sharply—and he was sorry for his mistake in a moment. "Nay, my lord, I am not drunk," she said, "but have been pouring out my soul before the Lord." Did he keep on being angry? (*v. 17.*) No, he blessed her, and prayed that God would grant her petition. And with comfort in her heart—the comfort that always comes from true communion with God—she went her way, and did eat, and was no more sad. (*v. 18.*)

(2.) A year has passed. It is again the day of the great pilgrimage to the Feast of Tabernacles, and Eli is again watching the people. There is Elkanah—perhaps he remembers him—but where is Hannah? Away in her mountain home at Arimathea; minding her baby boy! Oh what a glad, thankful heart she has as she holds him in her arms and plays with him, and thinks, like all the mothers in the world, that there never, never was a brighter, cleverer, lovelier baby since the world began. Poor fond little mother; They are nearly all the same as that. Thank God for the big, loving hearts that He has given them.

But many a fond mother is a very foolish one, and has very low

notions of what makes the highest good for her child. Many a mother thinks only of her boy getting on, and being rich, and by-and-by having a nice house and a good business, or a high name in the world. Are they good things? Yes; but you may have all these and be very miserable, and be a poor, contemptible creature, too. What is the real treasure of life to seek for one's child? What will make him noble, and good, and happy beyond all thing else? You remember how our Lord puts: "Seek ye first"—what? (Matt. vi. 33.)

That is what Hannah did. All the time she was playing with her little boy she was thinking of her high hopes for him, and lifting up her heart to God for him. She was remembering the vow she had made that day in the tabernacle that her boy should be God's servant as long as he lived. Oh! it is good to think of that sweet, stainless boyhood lived so close to God, and of the earnest, loving mother, whose highest ambition for her child was that he should be a noble, God-like man, given up unto the Lord. What is the most powerful thing in God's world? I think the prayers and tears of a mother for her child. I don't think God *can* leave them unanswered, so deeply do they touch Him. In this world or in the world to come they must be somehow answered. Oh! boys and girls, it is a very blessed thing, but it is a very solemn thing to have a holy, praying mother!

Three years more have passed, and Elkanah and Hannah are at Shiloh again with the crowds of people. But who is with them now? A tiny boy, about four years old, just beginning to speak distinctly. Poor little chap, he is to be left in Shiloh, to live in the tabernacle, and learn to attend on Eli. So very young to be without his mother? Was it not hard for him? But, oh! think what it was to his mother to leave him! How simply it reads in the story that she brought up her boy to Shiloh, and presented him to God, and that she made a little coat, and brought it up every year at her annual visit. But just think what it meant—to bring up her little boy, and leave him—to go back to the little mountain home to cry about him, and think about him every day and night for a year—to make a little coat for him, and work into that little coat all her love, and pain, and anxiety, and hopes—to look forward for twelve long months to her coming up again to take him in her arms once more, to try to quiet for one brief day the hungry craving of her heart. But her heart was full of love and thankfulness to God, who had so loved and blessed her and her little son. Nothing less would satisfy her than the complete consecrating of her boy to God.

"I give thee to thy God—the God that gave thee—
To be a spring of gladness to my heart!
And precious as thou art,
And pure as dew of Hermon, He shall have thee,
My own—my beautiful—my undefiled,
And thou shalt be His child!"

And so blessed was this self-sacrifice for God, that she actually sang a beautiful song of thanksgiving in the midst of her pain. Look at it (ch. ii., *vv.* 1-11), like the song of the Blessed Virgin, as we find it in the Magnificat. God always gives gladness to great self-sacrifice like that.

Boys and girls, your parents, too, have consecrated you to God. When? Baptism. Repeat baptismal formula: "To be Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." Some parents have forgotten it. Some, like Hannah, remember it always, and pray to God always to make use of their boy or girl. Sometimes, as with Hannah, it means a great wrench. I know of boys and girls called out to God's work to teach the heathen, and it was hard to let them go, perhaps to see them no more. But it has been done; it may be what God will want done for some of you—the blesseddest life in the whole world for you. Sometimes it may be but to serve God faithfully at home. Pray to God earnestly that, whether at home or abroad, He will keep you consecrated to Himself—granted unto the Lord.

LESSON X.

Retribution.

† Sam. II. 26-30, and III:

"Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed."

Remember last Lesson—last heard of Samuel? Little boy left by his mother to attend upon Eli, to minister in the temple. God had great purposes for that little boy. He was to be what? A Judge, a Prophet, a Leader, a King-maker. But it is not as any of these we usually think of him. Ever see picture of him? What like? Little boy kneeling in white robe beside his cot in prayer to God, or listening to God. "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth" (*v.* 10). Hear of this to-day.

Bigger boy now; perhaps ten or twelve (*Joseph, Antiq.* x. 4). Has been for years doing little deeds of service, lighting the sanctuary lamps, opening the doors, tending the priests, joining perhaps with little choir-boys, in his white surplice or ephod, singing the praises of God, doing little humble, childlike things in God's service and then at night, when he had trimmed the lamps, going off to his little chamber beside the church to sleep. Evidently priest's rooms off the tabernacle. His room near to Eli.

What is said about God's word, or message? (*v.* 1.) It was precious, or *rare*—no prophet vision—perhaps because the men, who should have received God's teaching for the people were too wicked to be trusted with it. People could not hear God's will. But God was preparing a prophet for them now.

Eli getting very old—shown in *v. 2*? Poor Eli! getting old, and with big sorrow in his heart. Why? Sons can give great pain to a father. These were very bad sons. Contrast with Samuel *ii. 26, vv. 27-30*. Partly father's fault—should not have let them be priests. And so God had had to warn him long before (*v. 27*). But no use—sons too wicked—old father too weak and cowardly. Think of him lying in bed, with his poor dim eyes wakeful in the darkness, and his poor sad heart thinking about his misery, wishing perhaps that his boys had been like that gentle, lovable boy who was sleeping in the little room so near. Suddenly hears curtain moving, child's footsteps, and in a moment the boy in his night-dress is beside him. "Here I am, sir; you called me." He had been wakened by a voice, and thought the poor old man wanted something. "No, my son, I did not call you; lie down again." Again silence; the wakeful old priest fretting over the pain and fear in his conscience; the innocent boy lying peacefully in his bed. What next? Yes—rushes in again. "Here I am sir; you surely called me this time." Had he? No. Do you think Eli wondered? Do you think his conscience frightened him? He remembered the warning of God (*ii. 27*). What could be this strange call to the child that nobody else heard? And then in a few minutes the boy rushes in again, this time startled and excited. "No mistake this time; I certainly was called." And then Eli perceived—what? Think of his wonder—prophets had ceased—no one for years had had revelation from God. What did he tell Samuel to do?

Think of the awfully solemn feeling of the boy. Would you have been frightened? Probably Samuel was, too, a little. But he was a true-hearted, innocent boy, with a clear conscience, and, therefore, probably not very much afraid. But think of him going back where the mysterious Voice was, and getting into bed. Do you think he would feel sleepy? Too excited, wondering. What a terrible message. What was it? Do you think he slept much after it? No, pain of telling his kind old friend, and the wonder and awe of thinking—"God has spoken to me. Am I to be a prophet, or what is the meaning of it all?" Picture the boy at daylight lying in his bed, pale, strained, excited, trying to delay meeting with Eli.

At last Eli heard him opening the doors, and he called him. See how he calls him, "My son." I think he was very fond of that boy. I wonder why he did not call him earlier. Must have been curious to know what God said. Why, do you think? Perhaps afraid; had not clear, innocent conscience like Samuel; perhaps remembered God's warning (*ii. 27*), and feared this might be announcing the punishment. (See Josephus, *Antiq. x. 4*.) Was it? Are you sorry for poor old man? How sore to hear! How touchingly resigned he was (*v. 18*).

LESSON.—That suggested by motto text. See a boy honouring God, putting duty and religion foremost as the chief things in life. Same in his manhood. All through his beautiful life he honoured God, and never was there a judge in Israel more honoured than he. Religion always makes an honoured life.

See Eli's sons, despised God, grew up bad, godless boys, bad, godless men. Ever see such men respected and honoured? They that despise God are lightly esteemed.

LESSON XI.

The Glory Departed.

1 SAM. IV.

¶ Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

Remember the old prophet's warning from God to Eli? (ch. ii. 33, 34.) Message by Samuel? (iii. 12-15.) Poor Eli! what a troubled heart he must have had as he thought of God's displeasure and threatenings!

This chapter tells of a terrible battle—with whom? When heard of last? Evidently recovered their strength again, to oppress Israel, but Israel strong enough to fight. So the two armies met at Ebenezer. What had always been source of Israel's success? Had they God's favour now? Why? Very corrupt and wicked. Evil priests' example made them still worse. God's favour cannot go with wilful sin. The important thing with God is not what we *say* or what we *do*, but what we *ARE*. Righteousness is the most important thing in our life. Nothing else can make up for it. God would not help these wicked Israelites. What was result of battle? *v. 2.*

A similar case before? (Josh. vii. 4-6.) What did Joshua *do*? (*v. 6.*) God's reply? (*v. 11.*) So again now this same cause. Did the elders inquire about their sins? What would be the right way to win back God's favour? Inquiry and penitent sorrow. What way did they try? (*vv. 3-5.*) No permission from God to do such a thing; but they remember the presence of the Ark, when Jordan divided, and Jericho fell. Superstitiously they think God's presence *must* go with Ark. If take Ark into battle, God *is bound* to save it and them. They were, therefore, very anxious to get this outward sign of God's presence, while very careless as to the righteousness of character which would really win God's presence for them. So Hophni and Phinehas brought them the Ark, perhaps against old Eli's will. And when the beaten Israelites saw it come, they shouted with a great shout, and frightened the Philistines. What did these say? (*vv. 7, 8.*) Had they reason to be frightened? No; God's favour and help had been driven away from Israel by sin. The Ark, a mere empty, useless thing without that; an "outward sign" without the "inward grace." Result? (*v. 11.*)

(2.) Scene changes to Shiloh. Eli sitting in his chair of office at the gate, watching the road for tidings; his heart trembling for his sons, but still more for the safety of the Ark. All the people

remaining in Shiloh anxious and excited. But Eli's trouble was the worst, conscience reproving him for these wicked sons whom he had reared; perhaps, too, for the Ark let out of his keeping. Messengers like Joshua's (Lesson X.), like the messengers of Roderick Dhu in *Lady of the Lake*. Like those in 1 Sam. viii. 11; 2 Sam. xv. 1; xviii. 19, &c. Swift, panting runner dashes breathless through the gate, in deep mourning, clothes rent, and ashes on his head. Surely bad news. Hear the wild cries, and questionings, and lamentations; "all the city cried out."

Two people to whom this bad news was to be fatal? Imagine the poor trembling old man as he listens. How old? Could he see messenger? Think of him as the messenger is being brought to him; the swift thoughts rushing through his mind of the old prophet's message (ii. 32-35), and Samuel's vision (ch. iii.). He can't see the rent clothes, or the ashes on head; but he knows by the "noise of the crying" (the word signifies any confused noise, like the splashing of rain, or the din made by a multitude of people) that it was bad news. "Tell me what is done, my son;" and he tells him four things, each worse than the previous one. What? Which of the four killed him? Why? The sign of God's presence was gone from the Church and the nation. It had gone because of Israel's sin, and he and his sons were largely to blame for it. Poor old man! though he was so greatly to blame, we must pity and respect him for his love to the Ark, the sign of God's presence. This loss was to him worse even than the death of his sons.

Another heart, too, was broken by the news. A pious young mother with her new-born babe. Who? Wicked husband had brought sorrow upon her by his evil life. Worse sorrow, now that she was a lonely widow. But, like her old father-in-law, she also felt that the worst sorrow was God's displeasure. The glory departed. The sign of the Divine Presence gone for ever. What did she call her child? Meaning? What a very dark, sad ending to the glory of Eli and his family.

LESSON I.—*Against Superstition.* It was God's presence and favour—not the Ark, the mere symbol of it—that was of importance. So with Church and Sacraments. The Church is as God's Ark in the world. But if it ever became so utterly corrupt that God had to leave it, there would be no help in it. The Sacraments are God's means of bestowing grace and strength on us; but it is possible by our sin to destroy their effect. It is possible to have been baptized, and afterwards to lose all the grace of Baptism. And it is possible for a careless, godless person to receive of the Holy Communion, and be none the better of it, but rather the worse. Like the Israelites with the Ark in the battle of Aphek, it is possible to think superstitiously of the Church and the Sacraments as if they were mere charms, by which we can force God to be present with us.

LESSON II.—*The worst trouble on earth is to be abandoned by God.* Whether with nation or Church, or with individual man. No

other trouble as terrible as that. Great trouble on our Church of Ireland twenty-seven years ago. Disestablished, disendowed (explain the words), impoverished, afflicted. But it was only money and position that we lost. We did not lose God, or forsake Him. The Ark of God—the presence of God—remained. That is our glory. And so our beloved Church weathered the storm, weakened and impoverished, indeed, in outward appearance, but purer, more loyal, more faithful to God, through the trouble that had come upon her, and rejoicing more in the devotion of her children than at any time before. Suppose all her riches and position had remained, and her clergy and people had grown corrupt like Israel, *there* would have been the real trouble,—the Ichabod,—the glory departed. So also in the individual life. Boy, girl, man, woman, the only hopeless calamity is the driving away God by our sinful, disobedient lives. If God's favour be with us, if we are still trusting and following Him, it is possible to bear calmly even great earthly troubles. But all the wealth of Europe would not compensate for the loss to an evil, selfish, Christless life, that has driven out God. Its glory has departed. Take care of your lives. You have been consecrated to God as children. Learn that the worst of all dangers is the danger of slipping away from Him. Pray Ps. li. 11: "Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me."

LESSON XII.

The Hand of God.

1 SAM. V. and VI:

"The Lord thy God is a jealous God."

Last Lesson about terrible defeat, capture of the Ark, the slaughter of 30,000 men. Even worse things we learn from other parts of Scripture—Shiloh sacked and burned, and its people massacred by the victorious Philistine: see Psalm lxxviii. 60-64; Jer. vii. 12, and xxvi. 9. Probably some of the "lost books" kept at Shiloh, then destroyed—Book of Jasher (Josh. x. 13). Book of the Wars of the Lord (Numbers xxi. 14). A terrible trouble, indeed, had Israel brought on itself by its sin.

(1.) Now the scene changes. We turn away from burnt town and weeping people and desolate sanctuary. We see in the land of the Philistines a great festivity—a grand religious procession. Great is the rejoicing at the gates of Ashdod, great the shouts and praises of Dagon, their god. Dagon has conquered Jehovah. He has taken Him captive. Into his temple shall the mysterious Ark be brought. Do you remember a former religious rejoicing before Dagon? (Lesson VIII.) Dagon and the Philistines did not come off best that time—should have remembered it. But no; they were

so proud of carrying off "the Israelite God," they would put the Ark at the feet of Dagon, to celebrate Dagon's power. Poor ignorant idolaters; how little they knew when they could think thus of the Almighty God, the Father of all men.

Ever see picture of mermaid?—Dagon like that—human body, ending in a fish. Imagine people actually worshipping and praying to an ugly, silly-looking image such as that, like the poor ignorant heathen in India and Africa to-day. You have seen pictures of the ugly brass and wooden idols which they worship, not in love, but in fear. They pray to them and do them honour chiefly because they believe them to be evil, and to have evil power, and to be able to do great mischief if vexed. What a miserable, horrible religion; all dread, all darkness. None of the comfort and love, and happiness that come from the knowledge of God and of the story of our Blessed Lord. Does God feel more of anger or of pity for them? Remember our Lord's pity for them, and His command to all Christians (Matt. xxviii. 19). God taught these idolaters a lesson about their idol? (*v.* 3.) And again? (*v.* 4.) Yes; head and hands off, nothing but the fish-stump left, lying, a dead, ugly lump of wood or brass, on the floor. How could they think that poor, degraded thing to be a god? (See *v.* 5.) Curious trace of this story in Zeph. i. 9—"those that leap on," or, more correctly, "leap over the threshold." How terrified the priests and people of Ashdod! They had heard of this Ark at the crossing of Jordan and the fall of Jericho and the smiting of Egypt (ch. iv. 8; vi. 6.) Now Dagon lay smashed—perhaps they could bear that—but horrible sores came on them, and perhaps swarms of field-mice in their corn (ch. vi. 5). Must get rid of this awful Ark. But not like to lose such a proof of their victory: perhaps it would be quiet at Gath or at Ekron. What happened? Surely they should have learned God's power now, and turned to pray to Him. But they thought perhaps that He was only the Jews' God, and would not receive Philistines. Were they right?

(2.) Scene changes again. A harvest day at Bethshemesh—thousands of reapers working amid the golden corn-fields. Suddenly a shout of surprise, of rejoicing—a wild, glad rush from the harvest-field out on the southern road. What did they see? Tell me the story of the cart and the two cows who had come without guide or driver all the way to Bethshemesh? Was it a strange thing for cows to do? Not really so, for all animals are constantly doing God's will—their powers, instincts, passions, desires, all given by God—their acts are the doing of what God wants done on earth. It was very easy, therefore, to make these two cows do God's special will here. And the five Philistine lords who had followed the cart—why? (*v.* 9)—they now learned that all was of God and not of chance.

See the rejoicing at Bethshemesh—the great stone (*v.* 14) turned into an altar, cart broken up, the sacrifice offered of praise to Jehovah; and after the sacrifice, of course, there would be a feast.

And then an awful thing happened. Heated perhaps with wine and feasting, they lost all sense of reverence, and encouraged each other to look into the Ark, and examine its contents. The priests and Levites of the town (*v.* 9) knew the duty of reverence, and the danger of contempt for religion; but the whole nation seems to have been degraded, and unfit for God's Ark or God's presence amongst them. What a number of them must have sinned! It seems that seventy men were struck dead for the irreverence. Of course, the number in the text must be a mistake. (Explain that numbers were denoted, as with us, by letters of alphabet, and that dots over letters greatly increased the number meant, so that mistakes in numbers could very easily take place. The Hebrew reads, "seventy men, fifty thousand men," which does not make sense, and must be a mistake. In a country village such as Bethshemesh, the whole population would not be very many, and probably those who looked into the Ark were a very small portion of them. Josephus, in his History, says "seventy men;" and some Hebrew manuscripts have same number.)

LESSON I.—The danger of irreverent conduct towards the All Holy, Almighty God.

LESSON II.—The misery and degradation of idolatry. Think of the poor ignorant Philistines, and the mutilated fish-stump of Dagon. Think of the horrible worship in India and Africa, and the sad, hopeless lives, with no knowledge of God—of heaven—of resurrection. Think of a funeral—heart-broken mother and her dead child, and nothing to give comfort or hope. Think of the desire of our Lord (Matt. xxviii. 19), and the blessedness of going out to do His will, and comfort and gladden those wretched lives. Perhaps the high privilege from God will come to some of you that you may go. Would you like to go? Would the Lord like you to go?

LESSON XIII.

The Reformation.

1 SAM. VII.

"Prepare your hearts unto the Lord."

The last three Lessons told of sad decline in religion—God forgotten—idols worshipped—people irreligious—even the priests of Shiloh so utterly vile that they but contaminated the people. So God's favour lost, and punishment incurred. Remember defeat at Aphek—destruction of Shiloh—capture of Ark—glory departed. Israel degraded, hopeless, crushed—oppressed—courage, and righteousness, and hope vanished together. Repeat "Twofold Lesson" of Book of Judges. We have come again to the same old circle—

Sinning : Punishment ; but now the other two things—Repenting : Deliverance—are soon to follow.

(1.) REPENTANCE.—Wretched state of Israel. All religious services probably ceased after destruction of Shiloh and capture of Ark. Like the days of Papal interdict in time of King John. Saddened and troubled, the people began to long again for God's favour. Conscience began to stir ; there arose a wistful, sorrowful desire for the God of their fathers ; they felt " the time long " (*v. 2*) ; remembered God's goodness in former repentances—the return of Ark (*v. 1*) fanned the flickering flame of hope. Perhaps God would forgive them ! Then, like John Baptist, Samuel appears, preaching repentance, bidding them destroy the idols, promising them God's favour and deliverance from their oppressors (*v. 3*). Like Moses and Joshua. All true prophets must teach that God will not take our part while disloyal to Him.

Long since we have heard of Samuel—when last ? Evidently he had escaped when Shiloh destroyed. Now many years passed ; he is a grown man, but still a faithful servant of God. Not every religious child grows to be a religious man. It was still Samuel's cry, " Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." See what a power for good he was. Men who put God and righteousness first are always of powerful influence for good. People must respect and attend to them.

Like the Huguenot pastors in France, he had probably to move secretly, through fear of Philistines, hiding in the caverns—showing himself now in one place, now in another ; gradually rousing Israel to see the greatness of their sins and the goodness of God. And so repentance, and fresh, new spiritual life, began amongst them, and with it the patriotic resolve to be free from Philistine yoke.

How did they show reality of repentance ? (*v. 4*.) Talking about religion, and saying, " We have sinned," is not enough. It is by acts that real earnestness is shown. Was God willing to forgive ? Glad to forgive ?

(2.) THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.—Now, at last, Samuel thinks they may venture on a National Assembly, to meet openly and declare for God, and discard Philistine idols. It was a great risk. It would certainly bring down the Philistines on them. Defeat would be terrible in their defenceless state. And Samuel was no warrior, like Gideon or Jephthah. He was but a righteous man—a holy prophet. All he could do was, " I will pray to Jehovah " (*v. 5*). This meeting at Mizpeh would terribly test their faith.

The day of assembly has come. From town and village, from mountain and valley, see the poor scattered people gathering timidly to Mizpeh. They knew the danger, but their trust in God was returning. And Samuel promised what ? (*v. 5*.) What was there besides prayer ? Fasting and public confession to God : " We have sinned against the Lord." And then the pouring out of water—perhaps an expression of humiliation—perhaps a form of swearing loyalty to God henceforth. A touching sight, yet

a stirring, inspiring sight—these bands of Israel sorrowing for their sin, and pledging themselves for the future to a righteous life—"to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with their God." Surely a glad sight for God. Surely there was joy in the presence of angels of God, &c. (Luke xv. 10.)

Ah! soon came the testing time of their faith. What? (v. 7.) Did they trust themselves? Did they trust God? (v. 8.) Tell me their request. Was it heard? Yes, and new power and courage came to these poor frightened men. They saw the powerful army coming to destroy them. But they heard the thunder of heaven rolling overhead. Like many children amongst ourselves, thunder seemed to them the voice of God (ch. ii. 10.) Jehovah thundered with a great voice (so Hebrew); and roused to joyful enthusiasm by that voice, they dashed down headlong upon the coming foe. What matter the poor armour, the smallness of numbers? What matters anything now, if God is on their side again? The force of the wild rush breaks the lines of the Philistines. A panic seizes them. They turn and flee for their lives to the shelter of Bethcar. What glad hearts they were that raised the Ebenezer (v. 12.) What thankfulness to the kind and merciful God. What happiness that they had now returned to His service.

LESSON I.—*The courage, and peace, and hopefulness, that come of repentance and forgiveness.* Illustrate, child forgiven by mother, and received back to favour. In turning to the Lord, and seeking His forgiveness, every man in Israel was conscious of right-doing, and conscious of God's restored friendship. The moral support of such consciousness is great to everyone. We saw in previous Lessons how misery, and weakness, and cowardice, came of forsaking God. We see here how courage and happiness came of return to Him. That is what gave the courage to charge upon the enemy. Remember no real peace or courage away from God. All peace and courage by keeping close to Him.

LESSON II.—*The way to victory.* What was the result of this turning to God? Not only victory at Mizpeh? (vv. 13, 14.) So with us. If you have sinned and lost heart, and find it hard to be good, turn like Israelites in penitence and prayer. Evil will attack again, and fight hard for the mastery. Like the Philistines, who did not want to let Israel go. But let there be prayer, and faith, and honest desire for consecration to God, and victory is sure. It must be so, since He is more desirous of our victory than are we ourselves. "They that trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved."

LESSON XIV.

Self-Will and God's-Will.

I SAM. VIII.

"God gave them Judges; . . . they desired a King."

Samuel at Ramah, at the old home of his infancy, where erected altar unto the Lord (ch. vii. 16, 17). In that home Elkanah and Hannah had lived and worshipped God. In that place Joseph of Arimathea lived in the years long afterwards. Probably after ruin of Shiloh (previous Lesson) Samuel had retired there, and probably for years remained, like Paul at Damascus, in quiet, lonely preparation by God for his great life-work. During this time of his retreat probably took place Samson's wild actions and fitful victories and tragic death. Then Samuel began to move secretly amongst the down-trodden people, and to rouse their spirit to religion and to patriotism (previous Lesson). And now, as Judge and chief of the nation, he still lived in the old home, taking his journeys "on circuit," like our own judges to-day, to judge Israel.

One day a deputation of chiefs to Ramah to see the old leader, now probably sixty or seventy years old. What did they want? (v. 5.) What two reasons had they? Ever before wanted king, and what answer did they get? (Judges viii. 22, 23.) Gideon's answer must be remembered—God was their King. That was the magnificent thought that always raised them high above level of all other nations, and gave such grandeur and nobleness to their history. Righteousness and holiness, not mere earthly pomp, was to be their ideal. Now they were anxious not so much for God and holy leaders who should be God's servants, God's "Lords Lieutenants," but a king who should be a soldier to fight for them, and to rule them in pomp, like whom? (v. 5, v. 20)—"like all the nations," *i.e.*, the heathen, Canaanites, Philistines, &c. Their glory used to be that they were *unlike* these nations.

Shew here that many sins come amongst young people from wanting to be "like other people." Boys want to be like comrades, who are often very bad examples—girls who would like to be religious, are ashamed because not "like others." Remember, you are members of the Kingdom of God—"the Lord your God is your King." (See vows in Baptismal Service.) Dare to be singular, to stand alone; never mind what anyone says.

Had these people any right on their side? Yes. Samuel old. His sons not good men. Philistines still a danger. Besides, God had almost promised king (Deut. xvii. 15-20). What then was wrong? They had determined to have a king when they themselves thought fit, *without consulting God's will*: They did not value their religious privileges; thought more of pomp and fighting than

of religion and God: They were dissatisfied with God's arrangement for them—impatient and presumptuous and self-willed. We know from *vs. 7, 8*, that in His own good time God would probably have given king, but not just yet. What should they have done? Come in prayer to God, seeking His will, and saying, "Thy will be done;" "We should like a king, but God knows best."

You see that was what Samuel did. Was he pleased at their demand? (*v. 6.*); vexed, irritated. It was a slight on him who had been so true and faithful; but worse, it was a slight on God. He could not understand anyone questioning God's decisions. But, angry as he was, did he refuse them at once or turn them away? What? (*v. 6.*) Prayed; leaves all decision to God. See the effect on him. Vexed and irritated, he went to God. He came forth a different man after communion with God; calm, quiet, restful. God had given him relief and sympathy, for He shared in his disappointment—submission to the Divine will—strength to bear the insult to himself. Wonderful what prayer can do. "Habitual prayer constantly confers decision on the wavering, energy on the listless, calmness on the excitable, disinterestedness on the selfish." Learn to live much in prayer and communion with God, to come to Him with every trouble and vexation. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee."

See here the sweet, innocent religion of the child had developed into the noble, unselfish religion of the man. Now that he knew God's will about it, he was satisfied. No thought for himself or for his sons. He was possessed of almost kingly power; his sons were in high and prosperous positions. But a man who lives much in God's presence thinks not of such considerations in the face of duty. In his high-souled patriotism and generosity, and his desire to do the will of God, he at once put himself and his sons aside. What matter about self, if only good come to others, if only the will of God be done on earth as it is done in heaven? Remember a great New Testament example of this disinterestedness? John Baptist. "He must increase, I must decrease: this my joy therefore is fulfilled." (Illustrate this spirit in the lives of children.)

Sadly he warned them of what they are bringing on themselves. Firmly he showed them of God's disapproval. But then he left them to choose. Did they ask that God should decide for them? (See *vs. 19, 20.*) "No," they said, "we *will* have a king. We want to have our own way." When grown men capable of deciding say such things, God often lets them have their way. It is often the only way to teach them their mistake. See parable of prodigal demanding, "Give me the portion of goods," &c. Poor fellow, how bitterly he learned in the far country that it would have been better to stay with his father. So now-a-days, too. It is a terribly dangerous thing to set up your will against God. "I must have my own way about choice of life-work, or about this or that smaller decision." Oh, you may force God to teach you your mistake by a very bitter lesson: Pray, "Thy will, not mine, O Lord!"

Here we have to say good-bye to Samuel. In next year's course he comes in again, and we shall see how nobly he acted towards the new king, who had displaced him. Free from every trace of jealousy, he exalted Saul to the uttermost, and loved him, and took him to his heart as a son. He pleaded with him, and advised him, and strove to save him from his evil dispositions. And when at last, with a sore heart, he had to pronounce the sentence of God's rejection on him, he went home to his lonely house at Ramah to mourn for that young king who had so spoiled his life. The story of the kings and the kingdom begins in next year's course, for Samuel the prophet was

"THE LAST OF THE JUDGES."

PART III.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

TO THE TEACHER.

PART III.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

(ST. MARK I-XVI. ACTS I-VIII).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

TO THE TEACHER;

VERY little preface is here required. Notice the title given to this section. Read over carefully Lesson II. on "THE KINGDOM OF GOD" before you begin your teaching. Try to work out for yourself the thoughts just sketched there in bare outline. All through the Gospel of St. Mark keep before you this thought of the "Kingdom of God" as the ideal ever present to the mind of our Blessed Lord—a colony of Heaven to be founded on earth, like the colonies of Rome founded throughout the ancient world—a colony whose laws should be the laws of Heaven; whose work and amusements should be according to the will of "The King;" whose subjects should be those who "suffer long, and are kind, who envy not, who vaunt not, who seek not their own;" and whose future should be in the perfect "Kingdom of God" above. Think of the Roman colony at Philippi, whose citizens so identified themselves with the far-off imperial city, rejecting "customs not lawful for us to receive or to observe, being Romans." (Acts xvi. 21). Think of St. Paul's teaching about the colony of Heaven to these same Philippians, so proud of being citizens of Imperial Rome. "Our citizenship is in Heaven" (Phil. iii. 20). Try to press on the children this thought of the Kingdom of God on earth as a colony of Heaven. There are "customs not lawful for us to receive or observe, being members of the Kingdom of God." Try to teach them the real, practical religion implied in being members of that Kingdom. Teach them that Bible-reading, and Prayer, and Sacraments are not in themselves religion—the work of the Kingdom—but rather the *indispensable* source of strengthening and stimulating power for performing that religion, that work of "The Kingdom." Show that the Incarnation, the Atonement, the coming of the Holy Ghost were all necessary parts of this ideal of Christ.

The story of the founding of the Church in the early chapters of the Acts is included as part of this section. We cannot say that the Church is the perfect embodiment of Christ's ideal ; but it is the best approach to it that humanity has attained. Like a sculptor trying to embody a very noble conception in very rough, intractable material, so is the Lord trying to embody His ideal in imperfect humanity. It is very rough, very imperfect ; but it is in some degree embodying the conception, and growing more desirous of embodying it, we trust, as the ages go on. Try to make the children feel sympathy with this longing of their Master, to recognise all that they owe to Him, and to see their duty towards that Kingdom of His into which they came at Baptism. Let them think of Him as looking lovingly down upon their individual lives, watching eagerly to help them towards beautiful deeds, rejoicing in their every struggle toward the right, and thinking wistfully of the day when His desire shall be accomplished ; when, in the blessed streets of the Kingdom above, " He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."

Thus may you help to teach your children real religion ; not the religion of mere fruitless church-going ; not the religion of mere emotions and excitements, which we hear so much of to-day, but the sound, manly, common-sense religion taught them in the *Church Catechism*, " to do my duty in that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call me."

ST. MARK'S GOSPEL.

LESSON I.

Introductory.

ST. MARK I. 1-13:

"The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

(1.) It is important to divide this Gospel clearly into Introduction, l. 1-13; Part I., Christ's public ministry in Galilee, ch. 1-x.; Part II., His ministry and death in Judea, ch. x.-xvi. Mark these divisions in the children's Bibles.

(2.) In teaching the importance of the Church in God's plan for the world, avoid all arrogant talk about our separated brethren. Try to impress the idea of a divinely guided Society of baptized people, who should all be one—that separations are weakening and injuring it, and displeasing Christ. Our Church has been to blame as well as Dissenters. Our duty to ask Christ to help us to bring all together again, so that the sin of separation may cease, and the Church of God be strong and united, as He desires.

(3.) The game of word-picturing here suggested, if not overdone, is very interesting to children. If the teacher has any vividness of imagination, he can hold them spell-bound, and can impart warmth and life and colour to the Bible story, that will make it most interesting to them.

(I.) HOW WERE THE GOSPELS WRITTEN? Meaning of "Gospel"? How many Gospels? One. How many separate accounts of it? Are all exactly the same? Why not? Illustrate four separate boys telling of an accident. Would they say exactly same things? Each tells from own point of view what struck him most. One notices something that another does not, &c. So different. But their stories in the main are the same. Show gain of four accounts of our Lord's life and work. Like four pictures of Him from different points of view.

Which came first, the Church or the Bible? Which first, the *telling* or the *writing* of the Gospel story? Which would come first to day in China? Of course, the Church comes first. The Lord first founded a Divine Society, and then through that Society gave the Divine Book. Men come first and tell the story of Christianity, and teach and baptize converts. Then after some years they begin to prepare written or printed Bible. Thus in China to-day. Thus also in early days. Gospels did not begin by Evangelist sitting down one day to compose his Gospel straight off, as we write books. The Gospels are just the stories told in their preaching by the apostles and disciples everywhere, and gathered together and

written down after several years had passed. Every day St. Peter, St. Matthew, St. John, and other teachers sent by the Church were telling the stories of Christ's life. St. Matthew told it to Jews in Judæa; St. John to Gentiles at Ephesus. So told in different ways. Each told what he knew best, and what was most suited for his hearers. By constantly telling same things they got to tell them well—to leave out what was unimportant—to dwell on what was most powerful for touching men's hearts. Thus the guidance of the Holy Spirit was preparing for the writing of the Gospels.

The Gospel, therefore, was first *oral*, or spoken. Then people began to write down the separate stories, lest they should be forgotten. Probably many accounts. (See Luke i. 1-3). But the greatest and best and most perfect were those four which we now have—the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and *chosen by the Church*, under His guidance, to be preserved and taught, while the other accounts gradually vanished away. Remember it was through the Church that God gave and preserved the Bible. Remember, then, that the Church of Christ is a very sacred thing, and very important to be kept in mind. It is God's appointed means of helping the world. It is the Divine Society founded by Christ. It existed many years before a word of the New Testament was written. It prepared the Gospels under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It bore witness to them. It preserved them through all the ages. It taught them to the world. It was the instrument used by the Holy Ghost for helping men everywhere to the knowledge of Christ. As far as we can see, there would be no Bible if there were no Church. People nowadays forget the sacred position of the Church. They think it means separate individuals, not one Divine Society. They split it up into hundreds of different bodies, who will not worship together; and then they ask, Where is the Church? Some people don't believe in the Church or its mission at all. (See *Lesson on Acts II.*) They do not understand what grand purposes the Church has accomplished, and what grand purposes God has still for it. Be you careful to remember it. Do all you can firmly, lovingly, prayerfully, to heal its unhappy divisions, for its Master's sake.

(II.) WHO WAS ST. MARK? Would like to know something of writer of this Gospel. Look at Acts xiii. 12. We hear of Mary, the mother of Mark, who had a house in Jerusalem. She seems to have been a person of some means and influence, whose house was a meeting-place for the early Christians in those dangerous days. Probably the Lord Jesus used to go there. Perhaps Lord's Supper instituted in its upper room. Most probably it was the upper room where the Pentecost miracle took place. So the boy brought up in a Christian home. Knew the chief men of the Church. We read that Paul and Barnabas quarrelled about this young Mark (Acts xv. 36-40). Yet he was with Paul afterwards at Rome (Col. iv. 10 ;

Philem. 24). But Peter seems his especial friend and spiritual father. Came straight to his house to tell of escape (Acts xii. 12). And long years afterwards mentions Mark affectionately as being with him (1 Pet. v. 13): "Marcus, my son." Early Church writers soon after Apostles say that Mark was the "interpreter" of St. Peter—that he put down what Peter taught him of the life of the Lord. So that we might almost call this the Gospel of St. Peter. Pleasant to think of the aged Apostle talking so warmly to his young comrade about all the pleasant memories of the Lord, whom he so enthusiastically loved, and the young Marcus who, as a boy, had probably seen Jesus, and heard the people talk of Him in his mother's house, writing down what Peter told him. Here is the account of a very early Christian named Papias, who is said to have been a hearer of St. John:—"Mark, having become Peter's interpreter, wrote accurately all that Peter mentioned. He did not, however, record in order either the things said or done by Christ, for he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but subsequently followed Peter, who used to frame his teaching in accordance with the needs [of his hearers], but not as though making a methodic narrative of the Lord's discourses. So Mark made no error in writing down some things as Peter narrated them."

(III.) "THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST."—To-day we have the introduction (ch. i. to v. 14). Then comes Part I. (chs. i. to x.)—an account of our Lord's ministry in Galilee; and Part II.—His last visit to Jerusalem, with His death and resurrection. Repeat these divisions. Mark in Bible. Remember them. St. Mark seems a very eager, hurrying writer. He makes his stories, like pictures, very bright, and clear, and interesting, and always every picture with Jesus in the midst. But he crowds them in so fast that we can hardly keep up with him. Like a magic lantern, where the pictures are run in very rapidly one after another. In chap. i. he has run in ten separate little pictures, each a perfect and beautiful little story in itself. (See Revised Version, where they are marked by separate paragraphs.) We have only time to look at the first three to-day, and see THE LORD PREPARING FOR HIS WORK (vv. 1-14). This portion is the "Introduction to the Gospel." Now shut your eyes, and let me throw the pictures upon the screen.

(a) First is thrown upon the screen—the picture of a wilderness land, with its gloomy rocks and trees, and a rapid river running between the green, reedy banks. There is a crowd of all sorts of people—soldiers, and publicans, and Scribes, and Pharisees—some with anxious looks, some with mocking sneer; and, above them all, a pale, earnest face, and thin, worn form, with a hairy robe and a leathern girdle about his loins. His eyes are flashing sternly; his speech is eager and passionate; he looks like an ancient prophet of God; he makes them think of "Elias, who was to come." And the gay courtiers of Herod, and the rough soldiers of the Empire, and the sneering Pharisees, and the proud Sadducees have to listen

to his terrible threats and warnings against sin: He tells all who are sorry for their sins to come down into the river to be baptized, that God may forgive them, and help them to be good. But he says: "I am only a poor humble preacher; I am but preparing for the Great Coming One whom the prophets told you of. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost." So ends the first picture. (b) Now shut your eyes again for the next. (Here picture after the same manner the baptism of Jesus; prepare your description carefully beforehand. Watch to see if the interest is kept up; if not, let the game of picturing stop. Otherwise, go rapidly on to the third picture.) (c) A dreary desert plain, with the wild beasts swarming about it, looking for their prey, yet passing peacefully and lovingly about the feet of their Lord. Make your picture at the close of the forty days of awful struggle, and temptation, and hunger, when He is pale and wearied with the strain; when the devil has departed, and the angels are ministering to Him. Take trouble to bring out the feeling of awe for the infinite purity and majesty of the Lord. John, before whom the greatest quailed, yet felt himself unworthy to loose the thong of His shoe, so wonderfully was he touched by that majesty of goodness—the fierce, wild beasts forgot their fierceness in His loving presence—the great, strong angels of God, who with a touch could destroy Jericho, were bowing at His feet, rejoicing to do Him service, and wondering that He should stoop to this poor life. What means it all? That the King of the strong angels—the Creator of all things—had come down to poor, humble, sinful men and women, to be their brother on earth, to save their souls, to help them to be good. "God so loved the world" (John iii. 16). Thus our Blessed Saviour prepared for His ministry. Next day we shall see Him fully engaged in it.

LESSON II.

The Kingdom of God.

ST. MARK I. 13-29.

"The Kingdom of God is at hand."

The object of the teacher in this Lesson should be to leave a clear, definite impression as to the meaning of "the Kingdom of God." It is most important to get true views about this—to get rid of the selfish thought that Christ lived and died only that I, and certain who believe as I do, should go to Heaven when we die. Teach them of Christ's beautiful ideal—try to rouse their enthusiasm for it—to send them out with an impression of what Christ intended the Church to be. Probably the Lesson here is too long. But with deep, prayerful study of the subject, the teacher who is in earnest can leave the desired impression with fewer words. It might be well to question the children briefly on St. Mark's seven pictures in the Lesson.

(1.) THE KINGDOM OF GOD.—I want to start with a question which will need all your thinking to answer. What was the favourite, the constant, subject of our Lord's preaching? Almost

all teachers who are capable of excitement and enthusiasm about their work, have some special pet subject—Temperance or Missions, or Housing of Poor, &c., about which they get most enthusiastic, always wanting to talk about it, always wanting to rouse us about it; every conversation, every sermon, of theirs will somehow lead up to it. People say—Well, that man has Temperance, Missions, &c., on the brain. He can't talk of anything else!

We may reverently say our Lord, too, had one pet subject, one pet enthusiasm, the centre of all His teaching. Every sermon, every parable, referred to it. His whole life has the picture, the model, the revelation of it. It was the vision that filled up all His hopes, all His outlook into the future. What was it? Think. Try again: His very first sermon in this chapter was about it? (v. 15). What was it? Yes. THE KINGDOM OF GOD. In Concordance you find it nearly 100 times mentioned: e.g., Mark i. 15; Luke iv. 43; viii., ix. 1, &c., &c.

Again, see parables—Kingdom of God like leaven—hid treasure—seed sown in a field, &c., &c. Main thought in them is the Kingdom of God. (Take trouble to learn and to impress on class that the Divine Reformer, like all the greatest of human reformers, was pre-eminently possessed with one great idea, and that idea was the Kingdom of God.)

(2.) WHAT DID HE MEAN BY IT? You say He meant Heaven—a happy land to go to when we die? No, He did not. Most certainly He did not. At least, going to Heaven was only a part—the far-off part—of His plan. Whatever He meant, it was clearly something that first of all concerned this earth, that had to begin, and grow, and spread for a blessing on earth. Remember parables about it. What was it like? Little mustard seed growing to a great tree—little bit of leaven spreading through a lot of flour—a little corn of wheat springing up, first the blade, then the ear, &c. Would that mean Heaven? No. It was a little something that He was planting in the world that should spread and grow till it grew to be a great thing—till it leavened all around it. Can you not yet guess what He meant?

Well, let me try to picture what I think was the vision rising in His mind when He thought with glad hope and enthusiasm about the success of His plan. I can imagine that I see it before me. Try and make the picture in your minds as I go on. He sees before Him a sweet, fair vision—a band of boys and girls, and men and women, of true, noble, generous, Christ-like hearts; the sort of people that you can't help loving and admiring; the sort of people that make life so happy and lovely for all around them. Do you know any person like that? It is a small band at first—small, like a grain of mustard seed—only about twenty or thirty, but growing, growing, as the ages go on, till it overspreads the face of the earth. He sees in the vision how everything bad and miserable vanishes before them—all greediness, and lying, and bullying, and spite, and drunkenness, and impurity—all selfishness and cruelty—all

poverty, and misery, and pain. They are such brave, generous boys, such tender, unselfish girls—such noble, self-sacrificing men and women, in some degree like the Lord Himself. They care for nothing but what is good and true. They fear nothing but grieving their Lord. Their chief thought is the service of the Kingdom—making all life around them happy, and holy, and beautiful. Would not it be lovely to see a great growing band like that, increasing every day? Would not they make this a happy, holy, beautiful world? Would not they watch over the sick? help the drunkard? and comfort the sorrowful? Do you think the mean, sneaking sort of boys would dare to be mean and sneaking? Would not the spiteful and untruthful, and selfish girls be utterly ashamed of themselves? Would not many people want to join the ranks of this Kingdom of God, if they saw it so grand, so beautiful, spreading over the earth? Well, that is I think, the vision of our Lord. That is what He meant by the Kingdom of God. Which should begin where? On earth. And go on whither? To Heaven.

(3.) HOW SHOULD PEOPLE ENTER THE KINGDOM (*v.* 15).—Repent: believe in the good news. Which comes first? Would it do to merely tell a lot of careless people that the way to enter this Kingdom was to believe in God's goodness and forgiveness? No. First repent—be sorry. *Then* believe in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Then come forward and be baptized (like soldier receiving the shilling), and thus join the ranks of the Kingdom of God.

(4.) RECRUITS FOR THE KINGDOM.—You remember what was said last day about St. Mark's set of pictures in first chapter. How many? Seven in to-day's Lesson. First is Jesus preaching the Kingdom of God. Six still remain. The first of them (*vv.* 16-21) tells of His going out to enlist recruits for the Kingdom of God (like recruiting sergeant looking for soldiers). Picture—Lake side. Shew map. Two fishing-boats. One near. Two rough sailors casting a net into the sea. Names? Could you tell what sort of men they were, whether they were fit for the Kingdom? Could not see their hearts. How did the Lord know? He could see their hearts. Perhaps men with many faults, but sorry for them. At any rate, He knew, and He called them. They knew Him already, and had been attracted by His goodness (if time, refer to John i. 40). What post in the little band of the Kingdom should they have? Fishers of men; what did He mean? Yes. As they caught fish out of the deep, so they should catch sinful, sorrowing men out of the wicked world, and draw them into the Kingdom—into the Church—into the band of noble hearts who should follow Christ. What a grand office, to help men to be good and happy and love Christ. That work given to us all, not only to clergy. On a little farther. Another boat. How many fishers? How many called? Whom? Perhaps He called Zebedee afterwards, or perhaps Zebedee loved Him already. At any rate, he was probably too old to be an officer in the band, to go fishing everywhere for men like his sons.

So you see the Kingdom of God beginning with five or six men; small like a grain of mustard seed.

(5.) THE WORK OF THE KINGDOM.—What is the work of the Kingdom? Doing beautiful deeds. Helping and blessing and comforting people everywhere. See the beautiful deeds beginning. St. Mark's sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth pictures; what are they about? Casting out devil (*vv.* 21-28). Peter's wife's mother (*vv.* 29-32). Healing the crowd of sick (*vv.* 32-35). Cleansing the leper (*vv.* 40-45). Question briefly, and picture the scenes very rapidly. How sad all this misery and sickness of the world must have made our Lord. What a delightful work was His to cure the evils and comfort the sufferers. Should you like to be engaged in it? Cannot do all the work that He could. Can you do anything of the work of the Kingdom? Comfort people; help them to be good; make life bright and happy for them. Pray for them that they may love Christ and be members of His Kingdom of God. Has the Kingdom grown much now? Yes, a great band, the great Church of God. Are all the members earnest about it? No. That is what spoils it and disappoints our Lord. That is what brings shame upon His Church. The Kingdom of God is the Church. But all its members are not in earnest now, as they were then. Can't you fancy how disappointed the Lord is as He looks upon the careless boys and girls and men and women, who don't care at all to do the blessed work of His Kingdom. What a pain to His heart. He has let you in through Baptism. He wants you to have all the gladness and blessing of working in His Kingdom, and making Him pleased, and making His poor children on earth happy and good. You are members of the Kingdom of God. Story—Frederick the Great examining school on the three great Kingdoms of Nature—Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral. "Now, what Kingdom does this belong to?" (holding up watch). "The Mineral Kingdom." "And this flower?" "The Vegetable Kingdom." "And now, what Kingdom do I belong to?" he asked. Expected answer, "The Animal Kingdom." But the children were puzzled. At last a little girl timidly held up her hand. "Well, my little maid?" "The Kingdom of God, your Majesty." And, amid solemn silence, the great King bowed his head. "Pray God that I may be worthy," said he.

(6.) THE STRENGTH FOR THE KINGDOM.—How can you be worthy? How can you escape disappointing our Lord? Get the strength for the Kingdom's work. See the Lord's example, *v.* 35. You never can do His work faithfully without that. Try hard not to neglect it; not to get up late and run down to breakfast without prayer. Pray to the Lord, whom so many are disappointing. "Lord! I want not to disappoint Thee. I want to be a faithful member of the Kingdom of God."

LESSON III.

Friends and Foes.

ST. MARK III.

" He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.

" But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God.

As there is not time to teach the whole chapter, it seems best to omit vv. 21-31, as being rather difficult for young children. In senior classes it may be briefly touched. Show their obstinate determination to find evil in Christ, such as already appears in Sect. I, and the bearing of this on His warning about the unpardonable sin. Show that in Revised Version the correct reading is given, "*guilty of an eternal sin*," v. 29, *i.e.*, that the sin is rather *indomitable* than *unpardonable*, that the man yielding to such sin, deliberately and persistently rebelling against promptings of Holy Ghost within him, is in danger of getting it so confirmed in him that it will never cease, and, therefore, can never be forgiven. Ask, "Could any penitent be rejected for it?" No, because no *penitent* could be guilty of it. His penitence would show that he was not sinning against the Holy Ghost.

It may be advisable not to read whole chapter at once, but section by section as indicated.

Be very careful to bring out the bright, happy view of God's purpose in giving Sunday.

What was last Lesson about? Kingdom of God. Remind children of Christ's ideal for His Church. Picture to them a band of white-robed Knights of God passing through the midst of this "naughty world" and making all life beautiful and holy as they pass. That is meaning of the Kingdom of God. Chapter to-day divides naturally into sections.—(1) The Sabbath, *vv.* 1-7. (2) Teaching and healing, *vv.* 7-13. (3) The Twelve Apostles, *vv.* 13-20. (4) The Sin against the Holy Ghost, *vv.* 20-31. (5) Christ's Spiritual Brethren, *vv.* 30-36.

Read Sect. 1. This tells of the Pharisees' anger at our Lord's notions about the Sabbath. Notice that last section of previous chapter is on same subject, and show (Matt. xii. 8, 9) that both occurred same day; that Lord was walking to church at the time through the cornfields. So they followed Him into church. What for? To pray to be made loving, and kind, and good? see v. 2. What wicked, spiteful men! Did not like Christ, He was so real and true; hated sham, and cant, and hypocrisy, and sternly rebuked them; they always watched to find fault with Him. Was it right to be careful about keeping Sabbath? Yes; but they were so silly about it, and so spiteful. They forgot God's loving purpose for it. What did they blame disciples for in field? Rubbing corn in hand. How silly! They would make Sabbath a torment. Did God give Sabbath to be a torment to people? What does Lord answer? ii. 27. Made for man, *i.e.*, for man's blessing and happiness. Does God like to see happy faces on Sunday? Like to see us out in fresh air enjoying this beautiful world? Yes, we are His children, and He made Sunday for our happiness, and recreation, and rest. No Latin, or sums, or hard school-lessons to-day for boys and girls. No work for tired men and women. What an awful

world if no Sundays! God says to us every Saturday night, "Come ye apart and rest awhile. I want you to rest and be happy." * This is the day that the Lord hath made: let us rejoice and be glad in it." Is it not good of our Father in Heaven? What a shame to make it gloomy.

But we have another part of us besides bodies? Souls. And God, who wants us to be happy, knows that a good, noble, beautiful life will best make us so. He says, "If my children only think of rest and amusement, they may forget about goodness and about my love for them, and so lose their highest happiness. The busy men and women may forget Me in the hurry of their work, so I want to remind them about Me every Sunday, and keep them near to Me." Emphasize the two sides. (1.) The rest and recreation for the body. (2.) Helps and reminders for the soul. And all *for the purpose of our good*, to make us happy, and holy, and loving to God and man.

Now, the Pharisees forgot the happy meaning of Sabbath. Thought of as of a taskmaster's order to his slaves.—"Don't do this, don't do that on Sabbath, or else I will punish you." Our Lord was vexed at the way they were spoiling God's beautiful gift, and so He often, in order to teach them, intentionally broke through their silly rules—intentionally worked miracles on Sabbath—broke the Sabbath, they would say. This angered them greatly. Now return to story of this disturbance in synagogues. How began? What ailed man? One of the old, lost Gospels says he was a stonemason, and had told the Lord that he could not earn bread for his family. Picture—village church—man on seat—arm hanging dead—his eager eyes fixed on Jesus. Jesus' pitying eyes on him. Suddenly He speaks out—what? Now see the Pharisees whispering and watching. Oh, this wicked Sabbath-breaker! going to heal a man on Sabbath! Hear them call out to stop Him. "Is it lawful to heal," etc. (Matt. xii. 10). His reply (Mark iii. 4). Is it best on Sabbath to do *good*, as I am doing, or *harm*, as you wicked, spiteful people are doing? What did they say? (a. 4). How did He feel about it? (v. 5). Angry. Is not anger wrong? No, it is right to be very angry with sin, with spite, and bigotry, and hypocrisy. It was right to be angry with teachers who were turning people against the loving Father, and spoiling His blessed Sabbath gift. Our Lord often angry with such. But was it vicious anger against the men, that would make Him like to hurt them? See next word "Grieved at," &c. That is the right anger, to love God so greatly as to be angry with all sin, yet grieved and sorrowful for the sake of the sinner. All this time the poor man waiting with his dead arm by his side. What next? Could he stretch it forth? Was it not dead? Yes; but when Christ told him, the poor fellow tried to do it, and *with the effort to obey came the power*. So with us—weak, powerless—can't love God; can't conquer sin, can't be truly faithful. But let us say, "Lord, I can't love you much; I can't serve you as I should; I can't be good as I ought; but, Lord, I'll try!" and *with the effort to obey will come the power*.

Do you think the poor stone-mason was glad? And the people? And the Lord? Were the Pharisees? What do? Went out to make plans against Him, and so went on and on in this wicked spitefulness till they brought the Lord at last to the Cross on Calvary.

If not time, next section (*vv.* 7-13) may be dismissed with a few questions, so as to give more time for following section (*vv.* 13-20). Read section. What about? Calling the twelve Apostles together. Had He not called them already in forming first ranks of His Kingdom of God? Lesson II.—Yes; but He was then only calling recruits—rank and file. Now wanted chief officers of His Kingdom to guide and rule it after He was gone. Very solemn task. See how He prepared for it (Luke vi. 12, 13). Think of Him going out alone in the late evening, and walking up that lonely mountain. He could not be happy without prayer, and enjoying the presence of His Father. There all the long, dark night He was in His deep prayer—in His great happiness. And then in the early morning the disciples come crowding after Him, and many of the people of the place. So He looked on the little band who had so willingly come to Him, the beginning of His Kingdom of God on earth. He loved them all. But all not fit to guide and rule. So He who knew all hearts picked out the right men. They were the first rulers of His earthly Kingdom—the first bishops of the Church. They afterwards ordained other men to preach and teach as the Church grew bigger, and placed some as leaders and bishops, to take their own places when they were gone; and so down through all the ages comes the line of the bishops and clergy of the Church, the first of the line being appointed by the Lord.

How many? Name them? What did he purpose for them? (*v.* 14). That they might be *with Him* in his own immediate company. What a blessed position! Beautiful thought. He wants His teachers to be in close company with Himself—the clergy and Sunday School teachers to be much in communion with Him, and then go out to tell others about Him. What their chief work? To preach. In some things they were very different? Some fishers—others not. One collected taxes. One, Simon the Zealot, opposed the taxes. Peter—bold, fiery, impetuous. Thomas—desponding and doubting. Nathanael so simple and guileless. John so deeply affectionate, &c., &c.

But in one thing all were alike. What? All loved the Lord, and wanted to please Him.

LESSON I.—Boys and girls very different in manner and disposition—illustrate from class. Do these differences make you unfit to be Christ's disciples? What is the one thing in which all His disciples are alike? All love the Lord, and want to please Him. What does He call them at the close of this chapter? (*v.* 35).

LESSON II.—He first calls members into the rank and file of His Kingdom—to be His disciples—to love Him, and want to please Him. From them He picks out those for special work. Perhaps

He will want some of you by-and-by as missionaries, or to do some other great work for Him at home or abroad. If so, He will call you again. Should you like to be called by Him to do great work in His Kingdom?

LESSON IV.

The Mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

ST. MARK IV. to v. 25.

"If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know of the teaching."

Close your eyes, and make this picture in your minds. A great mass of people, in their bright Eastern dress, crowded at the quiet lakeside—a fishing-boat lying at anchor a few yards away—and One sitting in the fishing-boat speaking to the crowd. He and they together are watching with interest a scene upon the hillside behind. And yet it is a very ordinary scene. Bring it into your picture. A large field upon the hill-slopes, with the rich, brown earth freshly turned up by the plough—a pathway running across it to the farmer's house—the grey rocks here and there peeping up through the earth—the bunches of thorn pulled up in the near corner, leaving many of their roots in the soil behind them; and above it all, the chattering and fluttering of wild birds over the head of a sower, as he scatters far and wide his golden corn seed.

Together they watch this scene, and then suddenly from the boat the Lord calls to them: Hearken! listen! Immediately they are all attention, wondering what He will say or do. "See that sower sowing his seed? See where the seed is falling, and what happens to it?" Again they turn to look at the sower in the field. Now what do they see? Where do they see the seed falling? How many different sorts of soil? Name them. Yes. 1st, on the pathway going up to the farmer's house, trampled hard through many years of trampling. 2nd, on *stony* ground? No; little stones in ground would not destroy growth—but *rocky, i. e.*, where the grey rock, rising through the earth, shows how shallow the soil is there. 3rd, on thorny, where thorns had been grubbed up, leaving some of roots behind. 4th, on the good ground.

Now keep your eye still on the field. What became of seed on pathway? On rocky ground? On thorny? On good ground? Notice the first did not grow at all. The second grew for a while, and then died. The third kept on struggling in a half-withered, useless state. The fourth grew well, and bore good fruit.

(2.) Now we may turn away from the field and the seed. The Lord wanted to teach by means of these of another field and another seed. This sort of teaching is called? Parable? What is a parable? Yes. Or it is a something in the outside natural world

that is very like something in the inside spiritual world: Why are they so like? Because both worlds are of God, and He works much in the same way in both.

Some of Christ's hearers did not care about the spiritual world, and did not want to know anything of it. But some had earnest hearts, and were anxious to learn. How? (*v. 10*). "To you," He said, "who come with simple heart and honest desire to know, I will teach the secrets of the Kingdom of God." So He begins:

(1.) The seed is? (*v. 14*), the Word—the Word of God. What sowing of it had just been going on? Yes; He thought of Himself like the sower in the field, scattering the good seed over that crowd of people—they were the field. Did the corn seed succeed equally well all over the field? Does the seed of the Word? What is wrong when it does not succeed? Is it the seed? No; the soil. Seed is all good. Both the wheat-seed and the Word-seed. God has given both a miraculous power—to live, to grow, to bear fruit. But the seed is tender, delicate, can be lost and spoiled by neglect, bad soil, &c.

Does anybody else act as sower? Clergy, teachers, friends, who speak to each other about holy things. Look round Sunday School now. See all the sowers in all the classes scattering the seed. Think of preacher in pulpit to-day, scattering seed through the church. Is it not solemn to think of the picture which our Lord gave of the hearts on whom it is sown? How many sorts? Like what sorts of ground?

(a.) Now take the first. When the Great Sower sows, by the Bible, or the preacher, or teacher, some falls on the pathway. Think of this class—this school—and say solemnly to yourself: "Some falls on the pathway." Meaning? Yes. That some—let us hope they will be very few—will let it fall unheeded off the hard, trampled surface—"in at one ear, out at the other." Children in school, men and women in church, who will listen without a single sin brought to remembrance—without one resolve for a better life; without one wish breathed up to God for strength to do that duty brought before them in the message to-day. What an awful waste. Think of the poor heathen wanting it, and not getting it, and we so shamefully wasting it. But that is not the worst. The hard hearts will get harder by it, like the pathway on which the sower often walks. Next Sunday the surface will be a little harder on account of the neglected seed and sowing to-day. And who is watching to snatch it away (*v. 15*). Did you ever feel him do it? Well, watch out next time. When some whisper of God comes in sermon or lesson, or in friend's advice, or in conscience rousing you to resist meanness, or lying, or ill-temper—if you refuse to receive it or let it grow, it will not be there to grow at some future time. Then cometh the devil, like the fowls of the air, to snatch it away. Sometimes you don't feel him; sometimes you do. Sometimes the sharp end of the seed seems to stick in soil, to get a chance of growing, and you feel conscience pricking

you to do something or resist something ; but you refuse. You can almost feel the devil snatching away the good seed that was trying to get hold.

Why does any heart become like pathway ? Whose fault ? Is it God's ? Whose ? Yes. When Christ has warned us that heart is in danger of getting harder, the seed of being snatched by the angels of Satan ever watching us, then it is our own fault if we do not watch and pray and be earnest. Suggest to form the habit of silent prayer for preacher and people when sermon begins. If much done, would greatly improve both preaching and hearing.

(b) Next sort of soil ? *Rocky*, not *stony* ; remember the distinction. How did it grow ? Fast, because of warm rock below, warmed by the sun. But then what happened ? Now, what sort of people meant ? Better or worse than stony ? Better, received the word, thought it very lovely to be a Christian, touched to tears by thought of Christ's love. Very gushing, emotional sort of people, greatly moved at Confirmation or such times. But no root—no holding on. The important thing in religion is not warm *feeling*, but earnest *doing*—eager clinging to Christ. In the little acts at home, in the little temptations at school, always trying to be loyal. Some people can't feel very deep emotion about Christ's love ; they feel almost cold-hearted. But they say—Never mind. In spite of coldness of heart—in spite of discouragement of trying to do right and failing—I will cry to the Blessed Lord, who is so good and so loving. I'd rather bear anything than be disloyal to Him ! Blessed is he that endureth !

(c) Third sort—Thorny ground. Seed sown where thorn roots remain, and both spring up together. These are still better than the last soil. They keep on caring to be good, but only in a half-hearted way. They are uneasy about religion, and give half the heart to God, and half to the cares and anxieties of the world. And so they have just enough religion to worry them ; not enough to make them happy. But what are they to do ? Must have cares about work and home and support and getting on in the world. Yes, but remember our Lord's advice : " Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Settle first of all to give your heart to God, and then, as His child, work hard and hopefully at all worldly things. Put God first. Bring all else to Him that He may help and bless you, and then struggle and work will not sadden or harm you.

(d) And last of all we have the good ground. They who hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold. No time to talk further of this. Take away solemn thoughts about this sowing of God's seed. Pray to the Great Sower that we may not disappoint Him. Pray to Him especially for the teaching in this class and in this school, that in the harvest of life there may be fruit of our sowing.

" Lord of Harvest, grant that we
Wholesome grain and pure may be.

LESSON V.

A Study in Conscience.

ST. MARK VI. 1-30.

"Their conscience bearing witness."

There are three subjects in this section:—The Carpenter. The Mission of the Twelve. The story of Herod. It seems best to choose one for *special* emphasis; so we take the last. It will require a good deal of thought and care and sympathy to teach this Lesson. First get the class in touch with subject. Question out of them their own experience of conscience pleading, approving, condemning. Don't be afraid that subject is too deep for them. They probably know more about it than many of their seniors. Read Lesson in Joshua on Achan.

(1.) First section (*vv.* 1-6) is about "The Carpenter." Where was this scene? Synagogue at Nazareth; own country. People assembled in church. A strange preacher to-day. Yet not strange; they recognise Him as He speaks. But so wonderful a sermon never preached there before. Such wisdom; such powerful speaking; such sweet, loving words. What did congregation say about sermon? about preacher? Yes; astonished, but jealous and prejudiced. He was not a gentleman; never been to colleges of Rabbis. They remember Him as a young carpenter, making benches and tables for their houses and yokes for their cattle. True, He was very good and kind and brave and self-sacrificing. He had worked to support the poor widowed mother when Joseph died. But He was only a common carpenter, and it was impertinent of Him to set up to teach His betters. They would not listen. They were offended in Him.

Teach here briefly that "rank is but the guinea stamp." "'Tis only noble to be good." Teach the nobleness of all honest work. Christ teaches us how grand a workman's life can be. He teaches that all work may be religious, even a boy's or girl's learning lessons. He was learning His lessons one day from the doctors and teachers (Luke ii. 46), and He called it "my Father's business." So all children's lessons may be. St. Paul speaks of servants' or slaves' work. It must be done well, he says, "for ye serve the Lord Christ." (Col. iii. 24.)

Question briefly on next section (*vv.* 6-13); but as the Apostles and their work have been referred to in earlier Lesson it may be lightly touched on here.

(2.) Now comes a "study in conscience." After getting class to realize conscience in themselves, as already suggested, read from *v.* 14 on. Here is Herod, a Sadducee. Not believing in angel, or spirit, or resurrection—yet terrified at the new Teacher's coming. What does he think? Friends say that it is Elijah, or one of the prophets. "No," cries this terrified unbeliever, "it is John, whom," etc. How could he think that? Ah, it was the torture of conscience within him. It was God's judgment already begun in his soul. Did you ever feel any pain of conscience? Even if nobody knew or could punish? How awfully solemn: Who put

this conscience in us? What does it do? It judges every action; it gives approval or condemnation, makes happy or miserable. It warns of God's punishments hereafter. What an awful thing. Yet what a blessed thing. God's gift to keep us doing right—to frighten us from doing wrong.

Why Herod frightened? (*vv. 16-20.*) Herod had committed a great sin. Put away own wife, and took brother's wife to be his. Do you think his conscience told him he ought not? Yes: even in the worst and most ignorant it does that. Some people think that Herod when a boy had good teaching from a religious foster-mother. They read in Acts xiii. 1, of a good, holy man, his foster-brother; and they think, and probably rightly, of a godly home, a good foster mother, two boys growing up side by side—one, to be a tyrant and murderer—the other, to be a teacher of the Gospel of Christ. At any rate, whether he had this help or not, be sure conscience pressed him not to do this sin. But he would not obey, and so he injured and weakened his conscience, and got his own way. Show the evil of resisting conscience. Every time that conscience says, "you ought," and you reply, "I will not," it makes conscience much weaker for next fight with sin. Every time you obey it grows stronger. Was it not good of God to make Herod's conscience hurt him?

Did God give him up now? No. A brave, true man felt it was his duty towards God and towards Herod to speak out boldly. Who? Never mind if he should die for it; he must do the right. And so he did a very brave and dangerous act. What? (*v. 18.*) He wanted to save Herod, and make him stop his sin. God was giving Herod's conscience another chance. Did John touch his conscience? Yes (*v. 20.*) He feared him. *Kept him safe* (R.V.) from Herodias. Heard him gladly. Did many things of what John advised. Reformed in many ways. See how, in God's mercy, his conscience was striving again with him. It seemed as if God would conquer and Herod repent. Did he? No. He "did many things." Would not do the great thing that God wanted—give up his awful sin. So conscience again defeated, again weakened and wounded. Herod made a worse man. Whose fault was this? God's or Herod's?

Steadily worse and worse grew Herod. Constantly defeating and trampling on conscience, till it lost its power. Now the awful scene in the banquet-hall. What a horrible birth-day! Picture the scene vividly in all its details. Half-drunken king. Shameless dancing girl. White, set face and gory head on the table. That noble, fearless prophet, who had tried to save him. What an awful pass to come to through always resisting conscience, and, therefore, resisting God.

Now nothing remains but agony and remorse. Never more will Herod have a happy birth-day. Look at his terror (*v. 14.*) Day or night, working or sleeping, he was never safe from the horrid vision. The dead face, the gory head, horrible, ghastly, threatening.

Awful power of conscience to venge itself. Illustrate *Dream of Eugene Aram*, &c. Conscience no longer power to lead him right, only to torture him. Lower and lower he fell. This is first connection with Christ—terrified. Next time, he wanted to kill Him (Luke xxiii. 7-13). Third and last time, with his men of war, he mocked the Lord, and set Him at nought.

Learn (1) the power of conscience. Given through God's love to keep us right. Danger of resisting it. Duty of obeying it, and praying to God to make it see His standard more clearly, and keep us to it more firmly.

If during this week conscience has to strive with you, say, "It is God's love trying to save me and keep me back." Lift up heart to Him to help you.

LESSON VI.

The Considerateness of Christ.

ST. MARK VI. 30 to end.

"An high priest who can sympathize with our infirmities."

The whole Lesson is about Christ's considerateness. Do not under-estimate the importance of teaching the lesson about holidays here. It is most injurious to children to associate God's will only with work and school, and disagreeable things, and to fancy that He only "puts up with" play and holidays, and laughter, and all that they enjoy. Apply the third section as a "parable of life," as indicated in the Lesson.

(1.) CONSIDERATE FOR TIRED PEOPLE.—Read *zv.* 30-34. Hold up hands, all who don't like holidays. You *do* like them? But does God? Does he not prefer work? You know your school work is God's will for you—sums, and geography, and Latin, and all hard lessons. God's will that you should do them well. But what about the amusements—the games, the fun in the play-ground—the Easter, and summer, and Christmas vacations? What about marbles, and handball, and football, and cycling, and cricket, and tennis? (For girls, mention girls' games.) One great use of studying our Lord's life is the finding out his opinion about matters of ordinary life. Now, here we have Him and His disciples going for vacation.

Disciples just returned from their mission; dead tired after tramping from village to village in the hot sun, preaching and arguing with unwilling hearers. What did they tell Him? (*v.* 30). And even while they told Him, had they rest? (*v.* 31). Many coming and going; crowding, clamouring, bustling; "no leisure so much as to eat." And the kind thoughtful, considerate Master knew it had been a hard pull for them, that there had been over-strain of mind and body, and that the best thing for them was perfect change and rest. And don't you think he needed it Himself even more? He had far more work and strain than they, and

the news that had just come did not make it easier. What news? (v. 29). (See also Matt. xiv. 12.) His cousin John murdered by Herod. He knew it was good for them all to get away from the work and the people—away amid the fields, and woods, and mountains—to walk and talk together; to rest body and mind, and to commune with God. What did He direct? (v. 31.) Were they not kind and thoughtful words? What do they teach us about our holidays, and rest, and recreations? That they are part of religion, as well as work is; they are God's will—God's pleasure for us.

Is it right to teach boys and girls that only lessons, and work, and sickness, and disagreeable things are God's will, and not to tell them that the games, and amusements, and merry romping everywhere are God's will, too, so long as wrong-doing is kept out? Would your parents like to see you never playing, or laughing, or enjoying yourselves? Would God like it? Parents want you to enjoy life. Does God? Yes; far more than parents do. Not lazy, constant idling. He hates that. He delights in hearty work. But He delights, too, in hearty play after work. Therefore, always remember in the midst of games and holidays that God rejoices in His children's enjoyments. He intended the lambs to skip and jump in the fields. He intended you to laugh, and play, and be full of happiness. Only one thing He forbids in your play, because it would spoil your happiness and your lives. What? Sin.

(2). CONSIDERATE FOR HUNGRY PEOPLE.—Read vv. 34-44. Saw His considerateness for tired people. Now see it for hungry people. Did He get the holidays that He wanted for Self and disciples? Did He get away from crowd to rest? Why? (v. 33.) I wonder if you would like, just at holiday times when very tired, to find holidays stopped. So here. Crowds saw them going, and noted direction, and came swarming after them—no rest; no quiet. Did He get vexed? (v. 34). His whole thought always for others. Far away in the country, many miles from towns and shops. What did disciples say? Jesus too considerate to do so. Doubtless very tired and faint Himself after that tiring day. So could understand their weariness, and the misery of walking many miles to find a shop. Tell me the conversation (vv. 37-39). Astonishment of disciples. What could He do with so little food!

Directions about seating them—in *ranks*—word means "garden beds." Evidently they were placed in regular rows and squares, and, with their bright-coloured dresses, looked like a number of huge flower-beds. Why so arranged? That all should be orderly, and none passed over. Like arrangement at big Sunday School treat. How many "flower-beds" would there be if all fifties? How many if all hundreds? Women and children sat in other rows separate. Therefore, easy to know number (v. 44).

Now, see the gaily dressed groups, like garden-plots, a huge crowd, and the five little barley-loaves in Jesus's hands. How the people would stare and wonder. What could He do? First He

looked up to Heaven and blessed them. His thoughts were always of Heaven and thankfulness. (*Refer here to grace before and after meals.*) Then? Then? Gave to disciples and they to poor hungry people—men, women, and children. How thankful the mothers would be to see the hungry children fed by Him. How glad He would be, for He so loved children. But how could five loaves feed 5,000? We know not. With God all things are possible. Does He ever do that miracle now? Would you be surprised if I had seen it done last year! How? Farmer put in a bushel of corn in ground, and left it, and God made it into fifty bushels! That miracle is going on every year. It was nothing difficult to our Lord. It was His ordinary work. He is always doing it. So the "water turned into wine" (John ii). Nothing strange or difficult in it. It is God's everyday work, only just done then in a shorter time. In vineyards of Italy the vine roots suck up the moisture out of the ground, and God turns it into wine. To us all these things are miracles. To God they are easy, ordinary things.

Notice how considerate he was for these people's wants. He loved men's souls, and helped and saved them. Yet He did not think of people merely as "souls" to be saved, but as men and women to be helped in every way. He is always like that. While thinking of the danger of sinful human souls, He thinks also of the burden of weary human hearts, and the hunger of starving human bodies. He loves to bless us, comfort us, help us, but, above all, to make us noble and good.

(3). *Considerate for frightened people* (read *vv. 45-52*). Mid-night. He is alone on mountain-top. What doing? Yes; He is always longing to be at prayer in communion with the Father. Praying probably for the world, for the poor people whom He had fed, for disciples. Where were crowds? Where were disciples? How situated? Did He know and see? Did they know that He was looking at and thinking of them? Like the poor troubled, frightened people in the world to-day. Is He looking at and thinking of *them*? Do they know? Some do. Most people doubt or forget that there is One always looking down, caring more than their nearest and dearest for the hard struggle of life. Just as on the mountain-top that night, so always. What did He do? Why? Bring out the thought of His care and consideration in going to help and cheer them, and apply it to the help He gives to frightened strugglers still. "Be of good cheer, it is I; be not afraid." Carry on the story, and apply it as a parable of life. When they received Him into the ship, the storm ceased, and there was a great calm. Show how that happens still when they receive Him into the ship.

LESSON VII.

Different Treatment for Different Souls.

ST. MARK VII. 24; VIII. 21.

"He careth for you."

Remark on the different way in which the Lord treated different people, as shown in this Lesson. Surely we must believe that there was a meaning for it, each soul being treated in the way best fitted to help it. So God has His different ways of treating souls now. Keep before you the object of getting the children into sympathy with His blessed purpose for the world, and desirous to be helpful to Him in it.

(1). THE CANAANITE WOMAN.

Read the fuller account in St. Matthew xv. 21-28.

In Joshua and Judges name the accursed people, to be driven out for their wickedness? Canaanites. Here, 1,000 years later, comes one of this accursed race to our Lord. But was she very wicked?

Tired and persecuted, the Lord withdrew to the north for rest (see map). He and His disciples could be tired as well as we. "Let us rest for a little; don't tell people" (v. 24). No use. The report of the great Teacher and miracle-worker had reached the north. One poor heathen woman had heard of His kindness, and sorely wanted help. Could not be kept back. She knew little of religion; but knew He was kind and powerful. "O Lord, save my little daughter. Cast out the devil." Bitter disappointment. Dead silence. Is He going to refuse? She struggles closer—"Lord, Lord, help me!" No use. He will not answer. Even the disciples plead for her, in order to get rid of her. What does He say? "Not meet to take," &c. Oh! how could He, so kind to others, be so harsh to her? What did He mean? Used the Jews' usual word of reproach for Gentiles—"dogs." Does she get up in a rage? "He called me a dog." Ah, no; she thought of the mad convulsions and horrible sufferings of her child, and she saw, too, something in His face not so cruel as His words. She will humble herself to the dust. She will force Him by her earnestness. And as she thinks of the little dogs under the table, a brilliant thought comes. She will catch Him in His own words: "Not meet to throw it to the dogs." "Yes, Lord, it *is* meet to do it [see R.V.], for even the little dogs eat of the little children's crumbs." What did she mean? Who was the Master? Who the children at His table? Who the dogs? Yes. She thought of the Jews as the children in the Father's house, and she said: "Lord, let me be even as a little dog. I don't want to claim a child's part; but I will not leave the table until you throw me the dog's crumbs. Even if you spurn me or drive me away, I will still follow you. I terribly want your help. I have at any rate a dog's claim."

Wonderful faith. Wonderful love for her little girl. No longer could the Lord restrain Himself. "O woman," etc. (Matt. xv. 28). Had He been unwilling before? Why so hard to her? We can only guess. He treated different souls in different ways. Probably

He saw hers was a great soul, worthy of a great testing. He wanted to draw out and strengthen her faith. Must have been something in His look that kept up her faith all the time. Now she gained not only her daughter's cure, but a blessing for her own soul. He did not deal thus with other souls. See deaf and dumb in this Lesson. Each soul treated in a way suited to it. *Teach here the power of intercessory prayer, and the lesson of faith, even when prayers not answered at once.*

(2). THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN.—Read *vv.* 31-37. St. Matt. (xv. 30) tells of a great multitude, lame, blind, dumb, maimed. St. Mark just selects one of the cases to tell of more fully—deaf and dumb. Can you do dumb alphabet? Why necessary? They cannot hear. So our Lord here made signs, touched ears and tongue, to show what He was about to do. But first took aside from multitude. Treated people differently, probably according to spiritual state. One healed in crowd—one taken aside—one healed with a word, another with a touch—one healed without even asking—one, as Syrophenician in this Lesson, only granted her desire after a great struggle. Treated each as was best for each. Why lead this man aside? Probably to make a deep impression. Think of the two alone. Lord looking with sympathy into the eyes of the poor mute. Giving him as much attention as if no one else in the world but himself to be healed. So often with people now. Healing from sinful life. Takes them aside by sickness or sorrow, that they may look, as it were, into His face, and be healed. Think how glad and grateful this poor fellow would be when he could enjoy all human speech and all beautiful sounds. How he would remember the Lord, who was so good to him. Nice to see how glad the crowds were. Even His own direction could not keep them still. They would insist on going all round to tell how good He was, and how powerful.

(3). FEEDING THE FOUR THOUSAND.—Read *ch.* viii. 1-21. What is this section about? What other miracle of feeding? Were they two different miracles? (*vv.* 19, 20.) What difference between them? Why did He perform this miracle? (*v.* 2.) In case of Syrophenician had He compassion? In case of deaf and dumb? Yet He treated each differently. Show? First—almost refusal. Second—granted when asked. Third—did not wait to be asked. Notice the eager zeal of these people. Three days with Him out in the wilds. Food all used up. He also full of zeal for their good; teaching noble truths; healing the sick. What a heavy, tiring strain, for three days, denying Himself rest, food, sleep. Now had compassion. Was it for Himself, since He was so tired? Never thought of self, but only of others. Think of that compassion looking down on the poor world to-day, with its wants, and sorrows and temptations. Is it just the same now? Yes.

“There is no place where earth's sorrows are so felt as up in Heaven;
There is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given.
For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.”

No need of saying much about this miracle, as we have had one like it in last Lesson. But think of the stupid dulness and want of faith even in His own disciples. See their question, *v.* 4, and the conversation in the boat afterwards, *vv.* 15-20. So all through His ministry. They could not sympathize with His noble thoughts about love to others, and the glory of self-sacrifice. They could not even believe in His greatness and His power. How lonely for Him. He had come down from Heaven, where all hearts were in sympathy with Him, and all through His earthly life He had to bear that loneliness of spirit. Don't you think it would be a pleasure to Him if His disciples were feeling eager with Him about good; sorry with Him about the sins and sorrows of men; willing with Him to give up all for God and their brethren?

Are Christians now different from these disciples? Are we? Let us think more of this. Think about this beautiful plan of His about the Kingdom of God (Lesson II.) Pray that we may be more in sympathy with Him; eager with Him about righteousness; sorry with Him about trouble; willing with Him to give up what is dearest for the sake of God and our brethren.

LESSON VIII.

The Glory of Self-Sacrifice.

ST. MARK VIII. 27; IX. 8.

"Whosoever shall lose his life for My sake shall save it."

In this Lesson it is best to pass over some of the details, and concentrate attention on the one thought—the Glory of Self-Sacrifice—the ideal for the earthly life, and the actual in the heavenly life. Christ's lessons about self-sacrifice teach the first; the story of the Transfiguration teaches the second.

Two questions of which I want you to find the answers to-day:—
(I.) What is the glory of the earthly life? (II.) What is the glory of the heavenly life?

(I.) THE GLORY OF THE EARTHLY LIFE. — Read *vv.* 27-38. Question closely on *vv.* 27-31. Distinguish questions, "Whom do *men* say?" "Whom say *ye*?" What were the guesses of the multitude which they heard of? What do these guesses show? No ordinary life. All felt that the beauty of that character, the wonder of those miracles, could not be explained in ordinary way. Something wonderful—divine. They could not understand the real explanation, so they guessed as well as they could. Next question? Answer? How did they know? They knew the O. T. prophecies of the Messiah, and nobody could be in Christ's close company without seeing how God-like he was; and besides, they were divinely helped to understand Him (Matt. xvi. 17). They, who of all the world knew and loved Him best, felt sure that He was no ordinary man like themselves, but the Christ of God.

Vv. 27-34.—Strange teaching followed—what? Why? Perhaps to keep them from thoughts of an earthly kingdom; perhaps to teach them what the Christ-life meant. How did they receive it? (*v. 32.*) It surprised and disappointed them greatly. No grandeur; no greatness; no shouting of loyal crowds at His feet. No; but a poor, spoiled life; a poor, despised, insulted man, persecuted and murdered. How could that be for the King of Heaven? God forbid! Hear Peter's astonishment (*v. 32.*) Why so puzzled? Could not understand the real glory of life, the glory of self-sacrifice. They thought that success and prosperity and happiness and earthly glory would be the life worthy of the Christ of God. Would it? Did His life show much of seeking for such? What did it show? That He thought self-sacrifice for others' sake the noblest of all things. Even if it led to insult and mockery and death, it was a life grander and worthier of the Son of God than all the glory that the world could give. Which do you think the higher and better—to make yourself happy, or to make others happy? Which does our Lord think?

Vv. 34-38.—Therefore He began to teach them what in God's sight is the highest glory of life—what? (*v. 34.*) "If any man will come after Me, follow in My footsteps." Some of these disciples wished to, some of you children wish to. How do it? By resolving to make yourself happy, comfortable, rich? No. By taking up the cross. Doing right when it is painful, for Christ's sake. Thinking of others' happiness more than your own. Being willing to lose what you like best for sake of Christ and for sake of others. (Illustrate from children's ordinary lives.) Thus Christ's life taught: "I am going for sake of others to lose self, to lose life, to spoil My life, as the world would think. He that would follow Me must do the same."

Did Christ lose happiness by self-sacrifice?

Shall we really lose happiness by giving it up for others and for God? No. In some wonderful way we get happier still. The inward peace of God and His blessing on our lives make up for all. So our Lord says (*v. 35.*) He that is willing to lose everything for the sake of God and right, he shall gain beyond his wildest hopes. Tell me, then, what our Lord thinks the glory of our earthly life?

(II.) THE GLORY OF THE HEAVENLY LIFE.—Now we come to next part—Glory of the Heavenly Life. There, too, love and self-sacrifice are the chief glory. But there is more in the heavenly than in earthly glory.

Read ch. ix. 2-8. Question closely on details. Refer to parallel accounts in Matthew xvii., Luke ix. Wonderful scene. Vision of Heaven. In the darkness of midnight our Lord and three apostles on a lonely mountain. He was praying (Luke ix. 29). They were what? (*v. 32.*) Another time they were sleeping while He prayed (Mark xiv. 32-40). While He prayed a wonderful, awful, glorious thing happened—what? Meaning of "transfigured"? Ever see mass of cloud in the evening, dull, plain, and sad-coloured?

Then the setting sun shines on it; transfigures it with golden glory; it becomes full of light and splendour; exquisitely lovely. Yet the same cloud. Something like that. His body, even His clothes, glowing with the beautiful light of Heaven—all white, brilliant, dazzling. Like a prince in disguise who had put on his royal clothes for a moment. "He decketh Himself with light as with a garment." What awe and wonder and reverence in the three apostles at seeing the plain poor carpenter's son, their companion, dressed in His real clothes. How differently they would feel towards Him afterwards!

Two other heavenly visitors also in glorious appearance—who? Think of the terror and astonishment of the apostles when they wakened up. Had they only dreamed it? No (Luke ix. 30). They had been a few days ago wondering that pain and death could come to the Christ of God; and He had been teaching them that pain and death might be very glorious things. And now, just listen to the Heavenly Three. What talking about? (Luke ix. 31.) In all the glory and dazzling splendour they talked of the death of shame on Calvary. Did they think it something to be ashamed of? No; it was the glory of the heavenly life, too, this glory of self-sacrifice. Think of the Heavenly Ones who had seen the Lord, and talked about this perhaps before He came down to earth. Think of them and the holy angels watching and thinking and talking about it in Heaven; and now these two talking about it with Him on earth. Think:—

(1). What a delightful world in the great Hereafter, where all is love, and nobleness, and self-sacrifice; where no selfish thought could exist. If it did, it would rise like an ugly little cloud in the clear sky of heaven, and everyone would be troubled by it till it melted away in the light of God's presence. Think of the glory of the heavenly life, where we shall have glorified, transfigured bodies, too; where all eternity will be occupied in planning unselfish delights for those about us, and rejoicing in the presence of the great, unselfish God, whom, at last, we are able to understand and love as we ought.

(2). Think of that same unselfishness as the glory of the earthly life. Only one perfectly unselfish life ever on earth. He lived the heavenly life here. He wore Himself out trying to help, and teach, and comfort men, and then set His face steadfastly towards Calvary, to be despised, and rejected, and tortured to death for the sake of the very people who hated and murdered Him. Then He said to all who would follow Him that they, too, must live the life of self-sacrifice, the life of the "Kingdom of God." Shall we not all try? Care for others' happiness. Bear painful things, and do unpleasant things for others' sake and Christ's sake. How could we help doing it, even if it were only to give Him the satisfaction of seeing us do it? "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied."