

IN THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

What the Church Folk Are Thinking About and Doing.

SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON and YOUNG PEOPLE'S TOPICS

WHEN THE LIMIT IS REACHED.

The International Sunday School Lesson for August 24 is "The Bread from Heaven."—Ex. 15:27-16: 36. By WILLIAM T. ELLIS.

Today finds the message for tomorrow in yesterday. What has been the guide for what is to be. The chief function of history is to serve as a sign-board. This western nation, setting out on untried ways, confronted by many perplexities, may well go to school to the Hebrew nation at its beginnings, more than three thousand years ago. For there are great patriotic and social lessons bound up in that experience, even as there are admonitions for the individual life.

It was all a question of the wisdom of going forward in new and untried ways. Is such a national experiment wise; or is it not better to endure the ills we know, than to fly to those we know not of? Shall we adhere to the old conditions, even though evil, rather than risk the hardships that are involved in the attainment of the new? Have we the courage to throw off old yokes, and dare the untried ways? Before they were a month out of Egypt the Jews were bewailing their folly in having left the certain comforts of slavery.

Although they knew it not—any more than we know it today—the children of Israel were being tested. Their fitness for the blessings of liberty and self-government was being probed. They thought they were judging Moses and Jehovah, although all the while they were being judged themselves. Judgments judge the judges. What a man says about another is often chiefly illuminating for what it reveals about himself. A circuit chautauqua has been going through a hundred communities this summer, and naturally, all the neighbors are passing judgment on it. At the same time, the towns themselves are being appraised by the chautauqua, although that side of the question never seems to appeal to them. What the Jews thought was the testing of Moses, was really the proof of themselves.

Softened by Slavery.

Let us go gently here, and not pour the vials of our condemnation upon these whimpering exiles. They were only a month out of slavery. Their condition had robbed them of virile manhood. The worst thing about slavery is that it gives people the souls of slaves. Now the Jews would have to pay the price of having had somebody else do their thinking and planning and providing for them during the long generations under the lash. This is the factor in the negro question which is too often ignored.

Attempting to exchange dependence for independence, slavery for freedom, the very depths of the souls of these Jews would be searched. Their leader had the problem of fitting them for self-sovereignty. They were in the condition of the debased type of citizen who would sell his vote for a drink of whiskey, a dollar or a job. Of course they were poor stuff, and we scarcely marvel that even meek Moses lost his temper over them. Now he had them in the wilderness where they were to be kept in training for forty long years, to get the slave-spirit and the rest of Egypt out of their system; just as infected persons are kept in quarantine for a prescribed period. The process was at times hard on the Jews, but it was for their health. They were what is termed in athletics "soft," and they needed to go into training.

The Grumblers.

From the ill-bred man who growls regularly at his breakfast, to the man who finds fault with the way the government is run, the land is full of grumblers. Most persons are discontented with their work and their lot. Much of the so-called "unrest" of our land is this spirit of vague fault-finding. It is a characteristic of our small-mindedness.

As we listen to the whimpering and wailing of the Hebrews, we must bear in mind that they were an ignoble lot, only one month removed from slavery. The ability to endure hardship calls for a certain quality of nobility to which they had not yet attained. They were not good travelers, for all such know how to put up with what comes. I once traveled through Turkey with an American college boy, and we had many rather trying experiences in out-of-the-way places—down in the region of the wanderings of the Israelites, for instance—but my companion, though young, was game. He never murmured at cold or heat or hunger. He had this first elemental quality of manhood.

These Israelites wanted Canaan—by the parlor car route. They resembled the host of young men with vague dreams of success who are unwilling to pay the price of toil and self-denial. The emancipated Jews thought to reach their goal without hardship. When trouble came, they grumbled at Moses. But, then, one of the principal uses of a leader is to take the blame of his followers for

their own shortcomings.

Marah Bitter Springs

The first loud growl of the Israelites arose when they found the spring at Marah bitter. They wanted all the comforts of home in the wilderness. Their protest was childish and unreasoning. But the patient leader sweetened the waters for them. The incident has come to stand for the bitter waters of grief, of which we all must drink. It suggests these observations:

Marah was on the way to Canaan. We should be grateful for every landmark that is on the way home.

Better far to have drunk at Marah than to have died thirsting for life.

We come to the sweet by way of the bitter.

Bitter experiences oft-times sweeten life; while wholly sweet experiences may embitter it.

It is asy to sing over the crossing of the Red Sea; it takes faith to be glad for the bitter experiences.

There are no bitter springs of experience that God cannot make sweet—and also use for the display of his providence.

Help As We Go.

This whole story is a commentary on the philosophy of going forward. The future is to be trusted. Progress brings providence. The way appears as we follow it. Nobody can see the end from the beginning; nevertheless, he should greatly dare. There was no mention of manna in the advertised programme of Moses. This was one of God's surprises. The unexpectedness of God's bounty is one of its sweetest qualities.

The past is put into pledge by God for the future. Hitherto he has helped us; therefore he will not fail henceforth. He leads by ways we know not—but he never fails to lead. Like an explorer traversing an old route, dotted by caches full of supplies, God guides all who follow him to storehouses of plenty. His resources never fail; they include manna and quail, and everything else necessary.

When man's limit is reached, then God's beginning is found. After we have come to the point where we can no longer help ourselves, then we find his help awaiting us. This Sunday school lesson will have been studied in vain if it does not teach us the old, old, simple, basic lesson of dependence upon God for the necessities of life. Its golden text might well be "Have faith in God."

Our Daily Bread.

That the host which Moses had led out of Egypt was full of weaklings, was made clear by their early whimpers. They rebelliously and ungratefully sighed for the sure comforts of Egypt. Better a full stomach than a free spirit, was their base creed. Nevertheless, amid all this discreditable clamor, God saw that here was the making of a nation, the beginnings of a people who should bear to all the world the supreme truth of the revelation of the one God.

A miracle brought manna to the murmurers. We need not bother about the how of it, nor about the exact character of the manna, and what natural agencies, if any, were used in its production. Back of all providences is the Provider. Our daily bread is no less from God's hand because it comes through harvest and mill. The lines of Maltbie D. Babcock will bear repeating:

"Back of the loaf is the snowy flour,
And back of the flour the mill;
And back of the mill is the wheat
and the shower,

And the sun and the Father's will."
Whatever comes into life may be accepted as manna, and of God's sending. This is the lesson of the lesson. When we have come to the limit of our powers, we have but touched the edge of God's providence. He does better than we desire or design. "Casting all your care upon Him, for He careth for you."

THE TEST OF RELIGION.

Terse Comments on the Uniform Prayer Meeting Topic of the Young People's Societies, Christian Endeavor, Etc., for August 24. "How I Have Proved Christianity and Seen it Proved." John 3:25-36; 21:24.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS.

This is the age of the question mark. Everything must stand the test of the new times. Nothing is taken for granted. Even the most fundamental institutions, like the family, are being challenged. Peter's admonition to Christians to be ready to give to every man that asks an answer concerning the faith that is in them, was never more needed than today. And the explanation of Christianity which the world most readily comprehends is that which is written in terms of character.

The one most unanswerable argument for Christianity is a Christian life.

Every little while somebody raises

a breeze of discussion by indicting present-day Christianity, by its own standards. A tremendous case may thus be made out. The weakness of it lies in representing Christianity as a failure; whereas, the most that can be said is that it has not come up to its own high standards. Contrasted with the condition of non-Christian lands, the state of Christendom is like paradise. And this is probably a fairer test than the other. The gospel has proved itself in the wonders it has wrought in making over the cruelty, unbrotherliness, and stagnation of paganism into what even the worst cynics will admit is the best order of human life this old globe has ever known.

"Test and see that the Lord is good!" is the Psalmist's challenge. That is fair. A merchant can make no greater inducement to a purchaser than a free trial of the goods. A common method of advertising is by the distribution of free samples. The Scriptures boldly affirm that the surest way to know the goodness of God is to try him and see. Argument is only vanity; put God to the test. The answer of the centuries to this is that "They who greatly trust Him, find Him greatly true."

The final proof of Christianity is—Christians. It makes men of those qualities of character which have come to be designated by the word "Christian." As we may fairly judge Buddhism by Buddhists, Confucianism by Confucianists, and Mohammedanism by Moslems, so we may test Christianity by its Christians. That proposition opens up to us a vista of the noble men and women we have known; the holy mothers and strong fathers; the persons who have won to greatness of character and service because of their religion. The unselfish and helpful folk whom we call to mind are legion. We recall too, that the persons among our acquaintances who have stood for the highest ideals of refinement and culture and citizenship have been Christians. We see the benevolent institutions of our time kept going by Christians. The new passion for social justice and well-being had its first prophets in the church, and today draws its principal support therefrom. So, in spite of many of us who have come far short of our Christian vision, we may fairly rest the case of Christianity on its finished product—Christians.

Society draws many horizontal lines; Jesus drew none, and only one vertical line. He knew no classes except the good and the bad, the sheep and the goats, the saved and the unsaved. This idea has been strikingly put in some verses by John Randolph Stidman:

"After all, and after all,
Since ever the world began,
Just two have lived, and two have died
In lowly mien, in lordly pride,
The rogue and the honest man.

"After all, and after all,
The classes are but two;
And both are rich and both are poor,
And both still know, as they knew before,
The things that they ought to do.

"After all, and after all,
Escape it we never can:
Only the choice of one have we,
And you must be and I must be
A rogue or an honest man."

The "eccentric" person is the one who is out of centre, he has been mal-adjusted to life. When Christ is the centre all of life swings true and normal.

Profession and possession are not always the same; but we may know that one is possessed of Christianity when we read the peace of Christ on his face and see his hands and feet busy on Christlike errands. What says James: "What doth it profit my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? Can that faith save him? . . . Yea, a man will say, Thou hast faith, and I have works; show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I by my works will show thee my faith."

The average man never reads treatises on religion, except those written in what Paul called "living epistles."

A few days ago I was in the home of a distinguished jurist, soldier and statesman. He had given part of his body to his country in war; he had held the highest office in his commonwealth; and he had been eminent in the councils of the church. Now he has come to the sunset of life. He has lived richly, and observed widely. What is his testimony at eventide? His faith holds out. It still is a spring of joy. With tearless eyes he will talk of the son, departed in the flower of young manhood and of Christian service, and of the immortal hope. Here is a vindication of Christianity; it has sufficed in life, it has sufficed in death; it has proved true in youth, it fails not in age.

The most real personality in the experience of countless persons is not wife or mother or husband or father or close friend, but Jesus Christ, mighty intercourse. He has been more real to the prisoner than his prison bars; more real to the invalid than

his sickbed; more real to the toiler than his task.

"Closer is he than breathing,
Nearer than hands or feet."

No statistics tell of this most vital factor in Christianity, the personal relationship of the individual spirit with the risen, still-living Christ. He is the supreme vindication of His gospel. "This is life eternal to know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou has sent."

SEVEN SENTENCE SERMONS.

Men are forever saying, "Tomorrow," when history, human experience, conscience and God are saying, "Do it now."—J. F. Norcross.

I want to help you to grow as beautiful as God meant you to be when he thought of you first.—George MacDonald.

They are slaves who fear to speak
For the fallen and the weak.
—Lowell

"They seem to take away the sun from the world who withdraw friendship from life; for we have received nothing better from the Immortal Gods, nothing more delightful—Cicero.

No man can avoid his own company—so he would better make it as good as possible.—Anon.

If our love were but more simple,
We should take Him at His word,
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord.
—F. W. Faber.

Everything noble and great in the Christian life is fed by solitude, and everything poor and mean and hypocritical and low-toned is nourished by continual absence from "the secret place of the Most High."—Alexander Maclaren.

Want Pardon for Blackwell.

Both advocates and opponents of a pardon for Claude Blackwell, who killed Dr. Fred Meisenheimer in Mecklenburg county, the 21st of May, 1912, were listened to by Governor Craig yesterday morning at the hearing before him.

The defendant was convicted last fall by a Mecklenburg jury of the murder and was sentenced to two years in the State prison. The defendant then appealed to the Supreme court, but the higher court affirmed the verdict of the lower court.

Dr. C. A. Meisenheimer, father of the deceased, and his brother, James Meisenheimer, appeared before the governor.

Counsel for the petition were Judge F. I. Osborne, and Messrs. J. I. Delaney and L. L. Caldwell, while ex-solicitor Herolt Clarkson, of Charlotte, opposed the petition.

OPEN CHANNELS.

In the supervision of rural schools it is very necessary to have open channels of communication. A careful consideration of the means at hand will show that keeping in touch with the schools, while they are in session, is not the impossible task many suppose it to be.

The teacher makes:
1. Weekly reports on self-addressed post cards.
2. Monthly and final reports on blanks sent out from the State Department of Education.
3. Such other reports as the superintendent and supervisor may need for the investigation of particular conditions.

Teachers and supervisors meet on common ground.

1. Monthly teachers' meetings.
2. District teachers' meetings.
By means of the rural telephone, the rural mail personal interviews and visitation of schools the supervisor comes into direct touch with the individual teacher.

As a means of bringing many interests close to the people, the county newspaper has an open field for service.—Franklin Times.

Depends on Point of View

Former Secretary Wilson of the department of agriculture was praising in Washington the agricultural school at Cornell.

"It is a practical school," he said according to the Detroit Free Press; "It wastes no time on useless things. It teaches practical and scientific farming."

"This school's viewpoint reminds me of the young farmer who was asked: 'Which should one say—a setting hen or a sitting hen?'"

"It's immaterial which one says," the farmer answered. "But it's tremendously material, on the other hand, that we should ask ourselves, when a hen cackles—"

"Has she been laying, or is she lying?"

Cured.

At the bidding of the school authorities in a certain country town, a doctor visited the local schools and examined the eyes of the children. The teacher next day sent a note to the mother of one pupil, saying that he was "imperfect optically."

Next day Johnnie brought back a reply to the teacher, which read:

"The old man whacked Johnnie last night, and I took a hand at him again this morning, so I think you will find him all right now."