

The Gospel Witness

PUBLISHED WEEKLY.

IN THE INTEREST OF EVANGELICAL TRUTH, BY JARVIS STREET BAPTIST CHURCH, TORONTO, CAN., AND SENT FOR \$2.00 PER YEAR (UNDER COST), POSTPAID, TO ANY ADDRESS, 5c. PER SINGLE COPY

T. T. SHIELDS, *Pastor and Editor.*

"I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ"—Romans 1: 16.

Address correspondence: The Gospel Witness, 130 Gerrard Street E., Toronto.

Vol. 3

TORONTO, NOVEMBER 27th, 1924.

No. 29

The Jarvis Street Pulpit

"HOW HE BECAME INDEPENDENTLY RICH."

(The First Sermon in a series on "The Adventures of a Modern Young Man.")

A Sermon by the Pastor.

Preached in Massey Music Hall, Toronto, Sunday Evening, Nov. 23rd, 1924.
(Stenographically reported)

"And the younger of them said to his father, Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."—Luke 15: 12



IFE is itself a great adventure. None of us have any choice respecting the port from which we sail; but each may determine the haven in which he will drop anchor at last. Life, moreover, is full of adventures all the way along. I love to watch the surging multitudes in a great city: and wonder whence they came and whither they are all bound. Sometimes the story of a life is written—generally of some man or woman more or less conspicuous in the public eye. But what a tale the ordinary life would make were it written! How the frail ship battles with the storm! What a struggle often merely to live! And as the eyes of the mind are opened and new realms dawn upon the consciousness, and life's correspondences are enlarged, how intricate become the problems of life! The elements of mystery multiply, the cross currents of subjective and objective affection, and, by and by, the children enter, and other lives are joined,—and beyond the far horizon the lights of another world begin to twinkle, and time is colored by eternity, and earth and heaven meet, as the soul moves forward toward its destiny. What material for stories might be found in the lives of ordinary men and women in Toronto. Here all worlds meet; and from here souls sail forth toward a land that lies beyond the horizon's union of sea and sky.

I have sometimes conducted a funeral service where the end of a long life has been reached—a life that has been inconspicuously lived, a life that has no great thing to its credit. And yet it has been well lived;—well lived in relation to the will of God, well lived in relation to one's human obligations. And I have

said again and again to myself, "That is in itself the greatest of all achievements". On yesterday we laid away the body of the oldest member of Jarvis St. Church. She was just two weeks, I think, or thereabout, past her ninety-sixth birthday:—a life that had been lived wholesomely, sweetly, and usefully; and she came to the grave at last as a shock of corn fully ripe. What a monument to God's grace! Ninety-six years over perilous seas, and—safe at last!

And I suppose we all have dreamed our dreams of the kind of life we should like to live. How many different elements enter into our human experience! How many different lives are touched by ours! To how many influences are we all subject! How far are we, any of us, the masters of our own fate? How far does it lie within the power of a human will to determine what the life at last shall be? We have dreamed our dreams; and I suppose one element in the dream has always been that of independence. We should like to be independently rich; we should like to feel that we are able to shape our own course independently of the direction or control of other people; we should like to be relieved of the necessity of daily toil; not that we are indolent and do not want to work; we flatter ourselves that we should be more industrious than ever, and that our work would become play if we were not driven to it. Somewhere I have read of an Irishman who was asked by a friend what he would do if he were suddenly to come into the possession of a million dollars. He said, "I would go and buy the biggest and loudest alarm clock that money could buy". "And what would you do with that?" enquired his friend. He replied, "I would set it for five o'clock in the morning". "And what then?" He answered, "When it went off, I would say, 'Aw, shut up! I don't have to get up'. And I would turn over and go to sleep again." He wanted to be absolutely independent, even of the clock.

But some of our dreams are inarticulate: they are dreams without words. There are feelings which defy all human expression. Few of us, I suppose, could faithfully picture even our own countenance on paper or on canvass; but we can look into a mirror, and see there an accurate reflection of ourselves. And few of us could express our dreams, or write out our desires. But if we come to this Book, we shall find that it is a mirror in which the deepest things of life find the most accurate expression: your life and mine are written in this parable of the Prodigal Son.

I make no apology for selecting the most thoroughly-worn passage of Scripture in the entire Book. When the water in the well is good, the path that leads to it is likely to be well-trodden. When the well is empty, the path soon becomes overgrown with weeds. And these passages of Scripture, which have been so well worn through the centuries, have been used because they so clearly define for us the things which we cannot define for ourselves. When Charles Dickens was once asked to name the finest passage of all literature, he instantly replied, "The parable of the Prodigal Son". Here all the emotions of the human soul find expression; all the desires which occupy the human heart are represented.

I.

Here is a young man who becomes rich in his own right, independently rich—a man who is endowed with powers which enable him to do just as he likes. He said to his father, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living". He expressed in that request AN INSTINCTIVE SENSE OF A RIGHT OF INHERITANCE; he was his father's son; and instinctively he felt that his father was under a certain obligation to him, that he had a right to a share in his father's property. He had no choice as

to his entrance into the world. But he was here; and being here, he said, "There ought to be somewhere a portion of goods for me, something that belongs to me; and I should like to have it for myself, to use as I myself desire". And he was right in that. Children have an inheritance in their parents, an inheritance which no father can afford to disregard. He is under a certain moral obligation to the child who owes his or her life to him; and what he has ought to be shared with his child. And the son has a right to expect a portion of some sort,—whether it be of worldly goods, of instruction, the counsel of wisdom, the influence of a godly life—he has a right to expect his portion of goods from his father.

Now, may I say reverently that the same principle holds in respect to our relationship to God: there are certain inalienable human rights which are ours by virtue of our creation. Presently I shall speak—on a later occasion at least—of the use this young man made of his endowments. But this evening I am speaking of the fact that he instinctively felt that he had a right to it; and his father recognized that right. And so I say in the soul's relationship to God, there are certain inalienable human rights which God Himself, according to the teaching of this Book, never fails to recognize and respect. A man has a right, a certain instrument says, "to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But a man has a right to the development of his own personality: he has the right to think, the right to his own moral judgment, he has a right to independent action, which the Bible—the religion of Christ—always respects.

My subject this evening is really the freedom of the human will, the divine endowment of the human soul to whom is given his portion of goods. I am not speaking of redemption now; but of our right in God as our Creator, to receive from Him our portion, and to be permitted to exercise our independence. I have been made a distinct individual, for whose conduct I am myself responsible; and instinctively I know that I ought to be permitted to do my own thinking, to do my own choosing, I ought to be granted the power of will to choose what I will do, and what I will be. So let us have no controversy with the man who says, "I have by right of creation a portion of goods: I did not choose to be created; I did not choose to come here; but being here by a power not my own, there are certain rights which inhere in that fact which I believe even the Creator Himself will respect."

II.

Now, let us take the second point: This young man CLAIMED THE POSSESSION OF THAT TO WHICH HE BELIEVED HE WAS THE HEIR. He said, "There is a portion of goods that falleth to me. Let me have it." He wanted to be independent; wanted to be able to administer his estate, little or much, for himself. There is in the human soul always a passion for independence. You see when God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness", He determined to make someone like Himself; not a machine, but a man; not a puppet, but an individual to whom He should give, in due course, his portion of goods. Let me find a very simple and natural illustration of this great principle. "Nature itself," the Apostle Paul suggests is a great teacher: "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering." (If women lose the sense of what nature teaches, it will be a great loss. I hope you ladies will let your hair grow again! Be sorry for yourselves until it is grown. That is just a little serious pleasantry, by the way. You "bobbed" your hair in ignorance; but let nature teach you.

If God wanted you to have short hair he would not have made it natural for your hair to grow long. Let nature teach you, that God did not intend that you should go to the barber.)

The Lord Jesus taught the profoundest truths in the simplest fashion. He talked about the sparrows, and about the lilies of the field, and about the grass, about the mustard seed. And He was the profoundest Teacher the world has ever known. Look at that little child! Let nature herself teach you. Its eyes were made for the sunlight. It is its right that the eye should be satisfied with seeing—it ought to have sight; its ears were attuned to the realm of harmony,—it ought to hear music; its little feet were made to walk,—it has a right to learn how to walk; its hands were given that they might become skilled in many arts,—it has a right to learn how to use them; its tongue was given to speak; by nature endowed with the powers of speech,—it has a right to learn how to speak; and a right to the free exercise of that power. It has a right to develop its own personality; it has a right to the full unfolding of all its powers of body and of mind. It has a right to claim the portion of goods that falleth to it.

The passion for independence expresses itself in many ways. When the child grows a little older, and father wants the boy to continue at school, the boy says, "I want to be independent". And he leaves school that he may have a few dollars in his pocket of his own, without asking his father for money. There are men here, perhaps, who have wrecked their whole careers through that folly,—because they insisted upon exercising their independence before they were ripe for it.

You find that in married life, too. Of course, for the first few days after the wedding, they both surrender their independence. And she thinks it is a lovely thing to have her husband pay the bills; she does not want to carry the purse; she likes to be taken care of—for a while. But after a while, she wants an allowance; and he—if he is wise enough to hand over to his wife a large part of his earnings—he likes to retain a little, so that he may be measurably independent, too.

The fact is, we have to live our lives as individuals; to exercise our own control of the portion of goods that falleth to us; and to give an account of our stewardship at last to Him by Whom we are thus endowed. What is the political history of the world, but an expression of this innate passion for independence,—a throwing off of the yoke of despots; and the determination of men to live their own lives?

In the religious realm, men have a right to claim their inheritance. When a young man comes to me and says, "Sir, God gave me a mind to think; and when you talk to me, you have to allow me to think," I am not going to dispute his contention,—he is perfectly right. There is nothing irrational in the Christian religion: God wants us to do our own thinking; He puts upon every one of us the responsibility of doing it. You must not accept your religion second-hand. You are personally responsible to Him Who has endowed you with the faculties of understanding which will enable you to understand the thoughts of God, as, by His Spirit, that understanding may be illuminated.

It is no excuse for you, my friend, to say, "I was brought up in such a school; I was trained in such a church; I was taught to believe certain things". God did not make you to be a machine: He made you to be a man; He made you to do your own thinking; He gave you a mind capable of thinking God's thoughts after Him. And He will hold you responsible for the proper exercise

of the faculties with which you are endowed. So when some of us contend for the old faith, and insist that the faith of the gospel was "once for all delivered to the saints", we are not putting a premium upon ignorance, or upon mere credulity. We refuse to admit, as some of the moderns would tell us, that our minds are "static", that they know no development, that they are not alert and open to the reception of truth from all quarters. But more of that presently. I want you to clearly understand that the portion of goods that falleth to you—your inheritance from the hand of God as a moral agent, as a man who can think, who can discern that which is good—that that inheritance of judgment, and conscience, and will, imposes upon you a personal obligation to exercise that tremendous power in the sight of God; and to think—to think—to think—to think as God wants you to think His thoughts after Him. We are not irrational, as later I hope to show you. Faith does not involve the stultification of the intellect; it does not mean the surrender of our mental powers: faith is not reason in its infancy, but reason grown to be a man. You have a right to claim your inheritance; and the man who says, "I must understand the thing that I am asked to believe", is perfectly right. "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" There is, of course, a spiritual understanding, of which I shall speak by and by. But my point is, that we are independently rich in this respect,—that as God thought before He acted; as He conceived the universe in His own mind before He flung the stars into space, and created the material realm; as He thought before He spoke, and before He acted; so have we a right, and an obligation to act as men and women of moral intelligence.

Furthermore: we not only have the right to reason; but we have the right to choose. The father did not dispute this young man's claim. When he said, "Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me", there is nothing to suggest that the father objected to the exercise of that young man's independence. Does any father here object to his son's independence?—He wants him, of course, to exercise his powers wisely, to choose that which is best—but does it not fill a father's heart with gratitude and pride when he sees that that son of his, who yesterday was but a boy—indeed, it seems to his father that it was but yesterday that he was a child in the cradle—growing up to manhood's estate? How he astonishes his father sometimes by his thinking, and by his sage counsel? And as his father sees that young man growing up, and taking his place in life as a man—does he object that the boy has become a man? Certainly not! Nor, my friends, does God object to our insistence upon our spiritual independence as men! He made us in His own image and likeness; and He wants us to exercise the powers He has given us.

"Thou seemest human and divine,
The highest, holiest, manhood Thou;
Our wills are ours, we know not how;
Our will are ours to make them Thine."

III.

Then this last word: THE FATHER GRANTED THE SON'S REQUEST: "He divided unto him his living". Now, don't you old theologians begin to quarrel with me. Though not very old, I am rather an "old theology" man myself. I have a lot to say to you before I get through. I am dealing this evening with the simple facts of human experience. And I ask every man and woman here this evening, if it be not true to your experience as to universal human experi-

ence, that God has divided unto you His living: that He has shared in some measure His powers with men; that He has endowed you with a moral faculty, enabling you to recognize the thing that is right as distinct from that which is wrong—the faculty which recognizes good as being something different from evil, which recognizes light as being forever separated from darkness? Now, don't fall back upon your training, and say, "I don't know the difference". You do know the difference. He divided unto you His living: He made it possible for you to know the difference between good and evil, between right and wrong, between light and darkness, between righteousness and unrighteousness. There is not a man here who does not know that that is a fact. He has endowed us also with the power of will. Alas! alas! I will show you later that we have made a wretched use of our powers. We have squandered our fortunes; we have made a pitiful exhibition of our independence. I grant you all that; but it is there,

"For man, as man, retaineth yet,
Howe'er debased, and soiled, and dim,
The crown upon his forehead set,—
The immortal gift of God to him."

You made a choice, did you? You answer affirmatively. It was your responsibility, was it? "Yes, it was mine." And you know that if you chose evil, you might have chosen good; that if you deliberately walked in darkness, you had the power to choose to walk in the light; that if you have turned your back upon God, and gone into the far country, you know that you were under no compulsion to do it! He divided unto you His living; but you chose to leave home.

I know of no more solemn reflection than this: that God has given to every one of us this awful power of choice. I wish I could find out some man here who has been trying to explain the failure of his life on the ground of his circumstances, on the ground of some hereditary taint,—because of certain evil companions, because of many misfortunes over which he had no control. For he has indulged in a world of self-pity; he has been excusing himself, saying, "I know I am not what I ought to be; but I am not to blame". I want to bring home to you, my friend, this great truth; that if you are not God's man, if you are not washed in the blood of Christ, if you are not saved by His redemptive grace, you are responsible; and nobody else is. You had the choice. This young man carried with him, even to the far country, that terrible endowment, that terrible power of going further away or coming back home again. I would like to send every man and woman home from this place to-night, feeling in his inmost soul, "When I at last stand before the Judgment Seat of God, I shall have to give an account for what I have done with the portion of goods that God gave to me; how I have used the powers of body and of mind with which I have been endowed".

And so I might close; but some of you may not be here next Sunday: some of you may not be in any place of worship; some of us may not be living. It may be too late for me to preach the gospel to you next Sunday. So I must not let you go, even at the risk of anticipating what I shall say with further elaboration in a later address. Notwithstanding our powers of will, they have all been used in the wrong direction; notwithstanding the mental faculties with which we are endowed,—they have all been biased against God; and instead of using them to get nearer to God, we have used them to pay our fare to a far country. And were it not for His abounding grace, my friends, we should

all be hopelessly undone. When this young man came back at last, he brought none of his portion of goods with him: he had squandered it all. And so have we used our independence,—only to forfeit it.

If we have used our power of will by yielding it to another, "unto whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are"; if we have brought ourselves again into bondage by the wrong use of these divine endowments, I preach to you the simple truth of the abounding grace of God in Christ, Who comes to pay your debt, to cancel your obligation, and to bring you back again into fellowship with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. As I have been speaking to some of you this evening, you have said, "I know, sir, I have a will of my own; but somehow or another that will has always led me in the wrong direction; I have a memory, but it has always remembered the things that I should have forgotten, and forgotten the things that I should have remembered; I have a capacity for affection, but I have always loved the wrong things; I have a capacity for understanding, but I have always been hospitable—mentally hospitable—to evil rather than to good. These splendid endowments have always been used to lead me to disaster, and almost to despair". But hear this gospel:

"Jesus paid it all!

All to Him I owe:

Sin had left a crimson stain;

He washed it white as snow."

There is another portion of goods that comes to us, not by nature, but by grace: the inheritance that is in Christ. Although we have forfeited the inheritance which was ours by creation, yet we can have a share in Jesus Christ the Son; although we have failed, we may yet succeed; although we have been defeated, we may yet be victorious,—ruined on the natural plane; redeemed by God's abounding grace. May He help us this evening to turn our faces toward home!

I hope you will continue with me in these studies in this fifteenth chapter: follow this young man into the far country; consider what it means. "His Trip Abroad" will be our subject next Sunday evening. But to-night, will you come home? Let us sing,

"I've wandered far away from God,

Now I'm coming home;

The paths of sin too long I've trod,

Lord, I'm coming home."

OUR GREAT BIBLE SCHOOL.

In view of the fact that a large Bible School in Jarvis St. was thought to be an impossibility, we are filled with grateful wonder as we see the average attendance maintained at above the 850 mark. Last Sunday the attendance was 878; at Parliament St. Branch, 290, and at the Chinese School, 52, a total of 1,220 in the three schools.

Monday evening last, about 120 teachers and officers assembled in the departmental conferences. The Pastor visited each department and challenged each to a race with the Adult Department, which consists of the Pastor's Bible Class, to see which department in the School can secure the largest attendance in proportion to enrollment. That is to say, the percentage of enrollment shown by the attendance will determine the department's standing.

Mere numbers are nothing, but the more we have in attendance the more we shall have studying the Word of God. Pray for blessing on Sunday and watch for next week's report.

The publication of this paper as a missionary enterprise is made possible by the gifts of members of Jarvis Street Church and others, and is sent to subscribers by mail for \$2.00 (under cost) per year. If any of the Lord's stewards who read this have received blessing, we shall be grateful for any thank-offering you may be able to send to The Witness Fund at any time; and especially for your prayers that the message of The Witness may be used by the Holy Spirit for the defence of the Faith, the salvation of souls, and the exaltation of Christ. As our funds make it possible, we hope to add to our free list, from time to time, the names of ministers at home and missionaries abroad.

EDITORIAL

"WE WILL REMEMBER THY LOVE MORE THAN WINE."

The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to think on whatsoever things are lovely. And of all lovely things, love is the loveliest of all. The Song of Songs is a dialogue of love. It is love singing the praise of love; love answering love; love vying with love in celebrating its own excellencies. And the spouse in the song calls up the image of her beloved. She resolves to let her mind dwell upon his glories; to revel in the luxury of being supremely loved, by remembering the surpassing love of her own beloved: "We will remember thy love more than wine."

It is significant that our Lord should have chosen to be enshrined in the memory of His disciples as a Lover and Redeemer. Not as a Teacher, not as a Judge and Ruler, but as a Lover Who died for His love! One characteristic of His love is that it can condescend without depreciation. Its stoop is not permanent; it can visit the slums without danger to its reputation; it can dwell among the unlovely without impairment of its essential character. We must be careful whither our affections lead us. The character of the object of our affection may reflect the moral quality of that sentiment. We say, "A man is known by the company he keeps"; we argue that birds of a feather flock together; we are suspicious of the human love which is unaffected by moral unworthiness in its object. But the love of Christ is like a sunbeam which shines upon a garbage-heap without pollution to itself; but transforms that ugly mass into a bed of flowers.

The love of Christ is lavished upon the unlovely; and is itself all the lover for its condescension. It stretches out its hands to the unloving; and its appeal is intensified by its rebuffs. It pours its treasure at the feet of the unloveable; and is only glorified by what would seem in any human love, a sacrilegious waste of wealth. Thus Christ loves us, the unholy, with the holiest passion. His love condescends and is honoured in the condescension; it stoops, and is exalted. Ah, He is the only Lover Who could afford to choose a flagrant sinner for a bride; He is the only Prince Who could afford to take a pauper for a consort. And this is the wonder of His love: that He is rich enough, and mighty enough, and independent enough—no, let us say rather, He is so rich, and so mighty, and so independent, that He can sovereignly love where He will, and whom He will! "We will remember His love more than wine."

Another characteristic of His love is that it immortalizes its object; it imparts its own nature to its object. By a subtle alchemy, it transmutes all it touches into imperishable gold. Human love cannot do that. It builds a cottage or a mansion; and then weeps over its emptiness; it enshrines a human form, and then breaks its heart as it exchanges its purple splendour for a shroud. But the love of Christ forbids the hand of Death to touch the spirit of its beloved; the love of Christ passes dryshod over the Jordan, bearing its treasure

above the swelling tide; the love of Christ builds "an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens"; the love of Christ makes for itself a lovers' walk in a garden of everlasting flowers beside perennial fountains, beneath the skies of an unending day!

"And we shall see His face,
And never, never sin;
And from the rivers of His grace
Drink endless pleasures in."

He has loved us with an everlasting love, therefore "we will remember his love more than wine."

Christ's love touches the very symbols of hate and transforms them into symbols of undying affection. The cross was the symbol of infamy: "Cursed is every one that hangeth upon a tree." But He took the curse out of the cross; and made it a symbol of love, a sign of mercy to all the world. He took the thorns—the fruit of sin—and made them into a diadem set with rubies. Yes, He took the cross of infamy, we repeat,—a signpost on the way to hell,—and making us to spell it with a capital He made the cross into a ladder to the skies, for poor sinners to go to heaven by! And He took the bread and wine, and said, "See in these a picture of Love's sacrifice.—This is my love in substance, and this is my love in solution; made sure to you by the faithfulness of the love of God." Let us remember this wonder-working Love more than wine!

AN INSPIRING EXAMPLE.

About two years ago a certain lady was converted in Jarvis Street Church. When she applied for baptism a few weeks later, she said that it had been laid on her heart that she ought to make restitution to the Lord for the arrears of the tithe which she felt she owed. She argued that the Lord was her God even before she acknowledged Him as such, and that having come to know Him as her Saviour, she ought to pay Him the arrears of the tithe back to the time she began to earn money for herself. She was a working woman; and told us that she estimated she owed the Lord on account of her unpaid tithes about five hundred dollars. No human teacher taught her; but her newly-awakened conscience was very tender, and evidently heard her Lord saying, "Pay Me that thou owest."

When she came to be examined for baptism she handed in a cheque for \$150.00, which she said she wanted to present to the Lord as the first installment of her arrears before her baptism. At a later date she paid \$50.00, and still later \$100.00 (all this in addition to a regular weekly contribution to the Lord's work), and a few days ago we received her cheque for \$200.00, the balance of what she felt she owed the Lord. In the letter accompanying the cheque this dear sister said some kind words about *The Gospel Witness*. She requested that the \$200.00 be credited to *The Witness Fund*, as the paper had been to her such a great blessing.

We record this incident here because we believe it ought to be told all over the world. She is not a rich woman and earns her living by hard work. But what if all God's people were to—we had almost said, "give" a tenth. No. What if all were to pay the tenth they owe? And what if consciences were to become so tender that men and women who have become rich were to recognize their obligation to God, dating back to the beginning of their earning days? What hundreds, and thousands, yes, what millions of money would

flow into the treasury of the Lord! If the principle exemplified in this story were practiced, within a year money would be available for every branch of the Lord's work, and thousands more missionaries would soon reinforce the missionaries on the field.

And all this goes to prove that there is nothing like spiritual revival for replenishing the Lord's treasury. When the soul's capacity for God is filled, like a fructifying Nile, it overflows with blessing to the whole world. When Mary broke her box of precious ointment over the Saviour's head, He said, "Whosoever this Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her." We venture to suggest to editors reading this note that they reprint it for the benefit of the Lord's treasury everywhere.

How the Lord Blesses the Witness.

In addition to the foregoing, we received three letters in this week's mail which were full of encouragement for *The Gospel Witness*. One was from San Francisco containing a cheque for \$22.00, another from Vancouver, B.C., containing a cheque for \$25.00, and another from the United States containing a cheque for \$29.00,—the latter for ten subscriptions for a year, and three for a year and a half each. Of course, we need a hundred times as much to do what we want to do with *The Witness*. But this is written to show how God is pleased to bless the paper by moving His people to support it; and also to suggest to others a way of investing some of the Lord's money.

The Whole Bible Sunday School Lesson Course

Lesson LXII.

December 7th, 1924.

ISRAEL'S DOWNFALL AND CAPTIVITY—II. Kings, Chapter 17.

This interesting chapter records the reign of the last of Israel's kings, and the disappearance of the ten tribes which constituted the northern kingdom, of which Samaria was the capital, from history.

I. The Last of Israel's Kings.—(Vss. 1—4.)

1. Hoshea continued the record of his predecessors, and did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. In this, he did what all men have done. "All we like sheep have gone astray." "By one man's disobedience, many were made sinners." 2. But this king varied his evil-doing in form: "But not as the kings of Israel that were before him." He did evil; but not in precisely the same way. What an epitome of history! In this late day, too, men may not sin in every particular, as others have done—it is, however, but a variation of form; for they do evil in the sight of the Lord. 3. Inevitably, he became the vassal of another. Sin always leads to limitation. He became the servant of Assyria's king. "To whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey." 4. He became at last a prisoner. Evil-doing never leads to an enlargement of life. Men foolishly imagine that if they can break the Lord's bands asunder, and cast away His cords from them, they will find liberty. But the license thus obtained, leads always to the narrow confines of a prison. There may be no stone walls; but the soul is bound with chains of its own forging.

II The End of Israel's Nationhood.—(Vss. 5 and 6.)

The only impregnable defense for an individual or a nation is to be found in one's moral integrity. Neither an individual nor a nation can stand against

its enemies when sin has sapped its moral fibre. Samaria was unable to withstand the enemy's siege. 2. They lost their land. Nothing is ever gained by rebellion against God. The way of the transgressor is always hard. 3. They lost their liberty. They were carried away as a nation of captives to a strange land. 4. They lost their identity as the people of God. With the sixth verse, the ten tribes disappeared from history.

III. The Reason for the End.

They sinned (1) by forgetting the miracle of their national deliverance. The exodus from Egypt was the standard by which God's people were continually exhorted to measure His gracious power. But they sinned against this manifestation of grace (vs. 7); and (2) imitated the heathen instead of obeying God. In other words: they substituted naturalism for supernaturalism in religion; they found their standards upon earth; and rejected the standard from on High. 3. They ignored the testimony of history. They committed the same sins for the doing of which those who had occupied the land before them had been cast out. (vs. 11). The judgments threatened in the law had been exemplified in the nations upon whom God's wrath had fallen; but His people were deaf to the voice of God's Word, even as they were blind to its historical confirmation. And so is it still. 4. They rejected the testimony of the divine Word (vs. 13). God never permits men or nations to go over the precipice without marking the path to the end with many a red light of warning. Thus every mouth shall be stopped; and all the world become guilty before God. Thus, too, in this Gospel dispensation:—"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." 5. God removed Israel out of His sight, save the tribe of Judah only, which He preserved for David's sake; and the judgment which fell upon the nation was a fulfillment of His oft-repeated word: "As he had said by all his servants the prophets". (vs. 23). 6. This fearful tragedy of a nation's extinction illustrates the fatal influence of one man, who substitutes policy for principle, upon a nation's life. (vss. 21-22). It is said, "Jeroboam drove Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin". Jeroboam was not guilty of some flagrant form of wickedness; his "great sin" was in the realm of religion. Professing to desire to maintain the spirit of the worship of Jehovah, he changed the letter of it; and his calves of gold in Dan and Bethel, intended only as symbols, effected ultimately the ruin of the nation. Any displacement of God, any substitution of that which human wisdom devises for that which revelation requires, is a repetition of Jeroboam's sin. It is true that "the letter killeth" when it is without the spirit; it is equally true that the spirit becomes rebellion when divorced from the letter. The tragic story of Jeroboam's influence upon his nation is but a corroboration of the essential truthfulness of the Genesis record and of its New Testament interpretation,—"By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin."

IV. A Name Emptied of Its Religious Significance.

The history contained in the section of the chapter beginning with the 24th verse, which tells of the carrying away of all the people of Israel and of an evacuation of the land by its inhabitants that was so complete that there was not one left to teach strangers the way of the Lord, while it is true history, is, in principle, both a prophecy and a parable of what history has often seen enacted since that day. Samaria had been Israel's capital city; and the name had been identified with the people, who, nominally, at least, acknowledged Jehovah as God. But Samaria, and that portion of the land of which it was the capital, was emptied of its population, and strangers who were heathen "placed in the city of Samaria, instead of the children of Israel."

1. Thus religious terms have often been emptied of their significance: they have been evacuated by the principles for which they stood; and have been given a different content. Thus, to-day, the terms of evangelical orthodoxy are made the dwelling places of pagan principles. 2. It was found that lions had no respect for mere names. Christianity, stripped of its supernaturalism, is no proof against the adversary who as a roaring lion, seeketh whom he may devour. 3. The religion of these newly-settled Samaritans consisted only in a fear of lions: there was in it no real fear of the Lord, and no love for His law. They desired a priest only to protect them from lions. These ancient Samaritans are not without their successors in our day. 4. From the 32nd verse to the end of the chapter, it appears that the Samaritans adopted an orthodox profession, but continued their heathen practices. Like Ahab, bent upon having his own way in respect to Ramoth-Gilead, he yet sought religious sanction for his own will. Thus men make religions to suit themselves. What subtle irony is wrapped up in this saying, "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods."

THE GOSPEL WITNESS FOR A CHRISTMAS PRESENT

It is often a problem to know what to give one's friends for a Christmas present. We venture to suggest a year's subscription to *The Gospel Witness*. If you spend two dollars on an ordinary present, it will probably be forgotten by the end of January, but *The Witness* will be remembered fifty-two weeks of the year. If you give a handkerchief it may be lost in a week, but *The Witness* may prove a handkerchief to wipe away the mourners' tears with the comfort of the gospel for a whole year. Or, if you give a muffler to keep one warm it would be much less serviceable than *The Witness* to keep out the winds of doubt and despondency. And as for chocolates—why not rather give your friends a spiritual meal every week for a whole year? Once more, some of our readers may find it a task to write letters. *The Witness* will carry a message of love from you to a distant friend every week for a year.

Only four cents a week will do it! We will send an attractive Christmas card in separate envelope to every one to whom *The Witness* is sent as a Christmas present, either with or without the name of the friend who subscribes, as directed.

Has The Witness Been a Blessing?

If it has, help us by sending *The Witness* as a Christmas present, as a thankoffering. Will not every reader endeavour to send us one new subscription between now and Christmas? When sent as a Christmas present, it would be advisable that the subscription should begin with the issue of Dec. 18th to insure the reception of the first number before Christmas. Who will be the first?

THE WEEK'S MEETINGS.

Prayer meetings Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday, 8 o'clock. Bible Lecture by the Pastor, Thursday, 8.45. Second lecture on "The Place of the Sermon on the Mount in the Teachings of Christ."

BAPTISMS.

Fourteen were baptized last Thursday evening before a large congregation.

THE PASTOR IN NEW YORK.

The Pastor will go to New York Monday evening, to speak at a Baptist Bible Union Conference which begins Sunday and continues till Wednesday evening. He will return in time for the Bible lecture and baptismal service, Thursday evening.

SUNDAY EVENING AT MASSEY HALL.

The Pastor will deliver the second sermon in the series on "The Adventures of a Modern Young Man", the subject being, "A Young Man's Trip Abroad."