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CONTENTS.

EDITORIAL:	
Notes.—Methods for Children's Meetings. Dr. Merrill's Article on Altars. International Convention Call. Self-Gratulation in Well-Doing. Self-Forgetfulness in Self-Absorption. The Evil of a Broken Will.....	129
Despondency Through Well-Doing.....	129
NOTES ON OPEN LETTERS:	
Bible Notation Once More. Greek Which is Not Greek.....	130
FROM CONTRIBUTORS:	
Psalms XXIII. [poem]. By Alexander R. Thompson, D.D.....	131
Palestine the Land of Altars. By Selah Merrill, D.D., LL.D.....	131
Life as a Leader. By J. R. Miller, D.D.....	132
Children's Meetings. By Mrs. W. F. Crafts.....	132
FOR CHILDREN AT HOME:	
Never-Dying Words. By J. Macdonald Oxley.....	133
LESSON HELPS:	
Lesson Calendar.....	134
[Lesson XI. March 12. Jacob at Bethel. Gen. 28: 10-22.]	
Lesson Text.....	134
Lesson Plan.....	131
Lesson Analysis.....	134
Lesson Bible Reading.....	134
Lesson Surroundings.....	134
Critical Notes. By Professor W. Henry Green, D.D., LL.D.....	134
Suggestive Jottings. By Professor Dr. Franz Dellitzsch.....	135
The Heavenly Pathway and the Earthly Heart. By Alexander McLaren, D.D.....	136
Teaching Points. By Bishop H. W. Warren, D.D., LL.D.....	136
Illustrative Applications. By H. Clay Trumbull.....	137
Teaching Hints. By A. F. Schaffner, D.D.....	137
Hints for the Primary Teacher. By Faith Latimer.....	137
Oriental Lesson-Lights. By Professor Dr. Isaac H. Hall.....	138
Blackboard Hints.....	138
Hints for Lesson-Hymns.....	138
Question Hints. By Miss Anna T. Pearce and Eugene Tappan.....	138
Hints for Superintendents. By Joseph B. Phipps.....	138
BOOKS AND WRITERS:	
Progress in German Theological Thought.....	139
WORK AND WORKERS:	
Another International Sunday-school Convention.....	139
Sunday-schools.....	139
Evangelism.....	140
FROM OUR NEIGHBORS:	
Development of Character.....	140
WORTH REPEATING:	
Pray Without Ceasing [poem].....	142
Perfect Through Suffering.....	142

Children's meetings are an important adjunct of the Sunday-school. These meetings are capable of wide variety, and there is need of wisdom and tact in their management. Mrs. W. F. Crafts has had long experience in dealing with the young, and she gives, this week, to the readers of The Sunday School Times, some helpful hints concerning the mission and methods of children's meetings.

After all these centuries of Bible study, there is still no end to the disclosures of truth through researches in the lands of the Bible. Prominent among American scholars in this line of research stands Dr. Selah Merrill, who has been, for a number of years, our consul at Jerusalem, and who has gained an international reputation through his important works: "Galilee in the Time of Christ," and "East of the Jordan." Dr. Merrill now throws light on the story of Jacob at Beth-el, by a valuable article on Palestine the Land of Altars, as given on another page.

Progress in the Sunday-school cause is both marked and promoted by the triennial national and international gatherings of the Sunday-school workers. It was through this agency that the International lesson system was secured to the world; and it is by this agency that the committee which selects those

lessons is appointed, term after term. Again one of these important gatherings is announced. It is to be held in Chicago, June 1-3. The official call for it appears, this week, in the department of Work and Workers. Chairman B. F. Jacobs requests that the call be copied by all papers friendly to its object.

Some men think that they are performing a positively meritorious act when they pay their debts, instead of recognizing that they have only done what they ought to do. And the same men (and others) seem to think that they have acquired a still greater degree of merit, when they have simply been honest enough to pay the Lord his due in work and worship. This tendency is illustrated in the case of a little fellow whose mother, one evening after hearing his prayers, added the commendation, "That's a very good boy." On later evenings the same praise was not forthcoming, but the boy himself was not willing to let it slip; and now he adds, on his own account, a regular appendix to his prayer: "Amen. That's a good boy—a very good boy. Yes'm." It would be well if such self-gratulation were confined to children; but it is to be feared that, if the feelings of a good many adults could be analyzed after an unusually successful prayer-meeting, or an unusually large contribution to the missionary cause, they would be found to be not very different from the child's self-praise: "That's a good boy—a very good boy. Yes'm."

Whoever is wholly absorbed in one purpose, has power for the time in the direction of that purpose. Look at a boy, for example, in a game of "peg-top." Holding his own top in his upraised hand, he fixes his eye and mind on the spinning top of his antagonist, which he purposes to "peg." In one sense he takes no aim, he does not even look at the top in his own hand, but his whole being centres itself on the top before him; and his hand and arm are subject to that all-controlling purpose of his being. And just so far as that boy is successful in this absolute self-absorption in the one thing he has to do,—not even giving thought to a fear of his failure,—is that boy likely to have success in the doing of that one thing. So it is in every sphere of practical endeavor. It is singleness of mind that gives gracefulness and skill and force of personal action. If one is thinking partly of himself, instead of thinking wholly of his mission, he is so far clumsy and embarrassed and ineffective in the line of that mission. This is as true of a public speaker in his advocacy of an important cause, as it is of a person entering a room where is an ordinary social gathering. Divided thought gives a lack of ease and a lack of power. Self-forgetfulness, in self-absorption, is the cost of every practical success in life.

The measure of will-power is the measure of personal power. The possession or the lack of will-power is the possession or the lack of personal power. The right or the wrong use of will-power is the right or the wrong use of one's truest personality. Hence the careful guarding and the wise guiding of a child's will should be counted a foremost duty of a parent or a teacher who is responsible for a child's training. Yet it is not unusual for a parent or a teacher to strive deliberately to break a child's will. Said a fairly

intelligent Christian mother, in speaking of the home discipline of her children: "I have a large family of boys. By nature they are strong-willed [possibly by inheritance]. But I always see to it that their wills are broken. The time has come with every one of them when a fair issue was made, and I have seen that now was the time to break that child's will. Sometimes it has been a very hard struggle, but I've always conquered. And after that one struggle, I've never had any more real trouble with that child's will." Poor misguided mother! Poor misused children! A broken will is worth as much in its sphere as a broken bow; just that, and no more. A child with a broken will is not so well furnished for the struggle of life as a child with only one arm, or only one leg, or only one eye. Such a child has no power of strong personality, or of high achievement in the world. A child ought to be trained to subordinate his will cheerfully to the demands of duty; but that is bending his will, not breaking it. No child's will ought ever to be broken. Nor ought any parent's will to be broken—even though it might seem that an exception should be made against a parent's will which would seek to break the will of a child.

DESPONDENCY THROUGH WELL-DOING.

Active well-doing is rightly supposed to have its reflex as well as its direct value; to benefit him who does the good, as truly as him for whom the good is done. But well-doing is wrongly supposed to bring immediate comfort and satisfaction to the well-doer, as surely as it brings help and cheer to the person who is the object of the well-doing. The popular thought that a man is immediately happy in proportion to the extent and result of his successful outlay for others, is in fact a serious error; for the truth is, that successful well-doing in the highest spheres of unselfish endeavor for others tends directly to personal exhaustion, and often culminates in extreme personal despondency. A failure to perceive this truth leads many a despondent well-doer to unjust reproaches of himself, and it causes many a kind heart to refrain from a proffer of the sympathy and of the encouraging approval, of which the truest well-doer stands in need, at such a time.

The reflex gain of well-doing is in the developed character of the well-doer; but that gain is ultimate rather than proximate. Ultimate gain often comes through proximate loss; and the immediate sense of any loss is depressing rather than inspiring. Hence it is that the depression through loss is commonly severe just in proportion to the extent of the outlay which is to advantage permanently the well-doer. The student who exerts himself most strenuously and most effectively in the struggle of an intercollegiate football match may indeed be an ultimate gainer in muscular power through the very outlay of that contest; yet, for the time being, he exhausts himself in the struggle, and an extreme of physical depression is the immediate result of the loss which is to prove his gain. A brave swimmer, who throws himself into the surf in order to rescue a drowning companion, is likely to bring a depressing and even an alarming exhaustion to himself just in proportion to the extent and severity of his successful struggle in that rescue; and whatever be his ultimate gain, his immediate loss

of Israel, and which by his command were to be worshiped (1 Kings 12: 28-32). Beth-el had a school of the prophets where Elijah and Elisha stopped on their way to the Jordan, just before Elijah ascended to heaven by the chariots and horses of fire (2 Kings 2: 2). Josiah, in his reforms, had the vessels of Baal burned, and their ashes buried, at Beth-el. He likewise burned the altar of Beth-el, and even the bones of the idolatrous priests, which were taken from their tombs for that purpose (2 Kings 23: 4, 15, 16). At one time Beth-el could even boast of royal houses, the residence of the king (Amos 7: 13). Among the last references to this place (Amos 5: 5) it is said, "Beth-el shall come to nought;" and whether the fact to which we are to refer was a fulfillment of this prophecy or not, we know that, sixty-nine years after Christ, Vespasian, in the month of May, before the glories of springtime had wholly departed from the Judean hills, and just on the eve of his being proclaimed emperor of Rome, was lying before this ancient town; and poor little Beth-el that once had justly been called "the house of God" and "the gate of heaven," was by the Roman arms crushed into oblivion (Josephus, War, 4: 9, 9).

Twelve miles north of Jerusalem on the road to Shechem there is an insignificant, wretched, filthy Mohammedan village called Beitin. This is all that marks the site of ancient Beth-el.

LIFE AS A LADDER.

BY J. R. MILLER, D.D.

It was a good while ago that a young man, sleeping one night in the open air, had a wonderful vision of a ladder that reached up all the way into heaven. Whatever else it meant, it was at least a vision of what his life might be, of what every life may be, of what every true and noble life must be. Its foot rested on the earth; and we must all start very low down. He who would ascend a ladder, puts his foot first on the lowest round. We cannot start in life at the top, but must begin at the bottom and climb up. We cannot begin as angels, nor as holy saints, nor even as moderately advanced Christians. We must begin in the most rudimentary way, with the simplest duties, just as the wisest man once sat with primer and spelling-book in hand.

But this ladder was not lying all along on the earth; its foot was on the ground, but its top was up above the stars, amid the glory of God's presence. A true life rises heavenward. It is a poor, an unworthy, life-plan that is all on the earth, that lifts no eye or thought upward, that does not take heaven into its purpose. The true life must press upward until it reaches glory. Its aim is the perfection of character. Its constant aspirations are for holiness and righteousness—Christlikeness. Its goal is heaven itself.

A ladder is climbed step by step; no one leaps to the top. And no one rises to sainthood at a bound. No one gets the victory once for all over his sins and faults. It is a struggle of long years; and every day must have its own victories, if we are ever to be crowned. It may give some people considerable comfort to think of life's course as a ladder, which one must climb slowly, step by step. A ladder is not easy to ascend. It is toilsome work to go up its rounds. It is not easy to rise Christward; it is hard, costly, painful. Railroad tracks suggest speed, but a ladder suggests slow progress. We rise upward in spiritual life, not at railway speed, nor even at the racer's rate of progress, but as men go up a ladder.

Then there is another side to this truth. Men do not fly up ladders; yet they go up, step by step. We ought always to be making at least some progress in Christian life, as the years go on. Each day should show some slight advance in holiness, some new conquest over the evil that is in us, some besetting sin or wrong habit gotten a little more under our feet.

"Heaven is not reached by a single bound,
But we build the ladder by which we rise
From the lowly earth to the vaulted skies,
And we mount to its summit round by round.

"We rise by things that are under our feet;
By what we have mastered of good and gain;
By the pride deposed and the passion slain;
And the vanquished ills that we hourly meet."

Every true life should thus be a climbing upward. We should put our faults under our feet, and make them steps on which to lift ourselves daily a little higher. Longfellow's "Ladder of St. Augustine" puts these thoughts in a striking way:

"Saint Augustine! well hast thou said,
That of our vices we can frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet each deed of shame!

"All common things, each day's events,
That with the hour begin and end,
Our pleasures and our discontents,
Are rounds by which we may ascend.

"Standing on what too long we bore
With shoulders bent and downcast eyes,
We may discern—unseen before—
A path to higher destinies;

"Nor deem the irrevocable Past
As wholly wasted, wholly vain,
If rising on its wrecks at last
To something nobler we attain."

Here is the key to all growth of character. We must rise by daily self-conquests. We must make stepping-stones of our dead selves. Every fault we overcome lifts us a little higher. Every low desire, every bad habit, all longings for ignoble things, that we trample down, become ladder-rounds on which we climb upward out of groveling and sinfulness into nobler being.

There really is no other way by which we can rise upward. If we are not living victoriously these little common days, we are not making any progress. Only those who climb are getting toward the stars. Heaven is for those who overcome. Not that the struggle is to be made in our own strength, or that the victories are to be won by our own hands; there is a mighty Helper with us always on the ladder. He does not carry us up, always we must do the climbing; but he helps and cheers, putting ever new strength into the heart, and so aiding every one who truly strives in his name to do his best.

The ladder did not come to an end half-way up to heaven; it reached to the very steps of God's throne. A true life is persistent and persevering, and ends not short of glory. It is ladder, too, all the way; it does not become a plain, easy, flower-lined path after a time. A really earnest and faithful Christian life never gets easy. The easy way does not lead upward; it leads always downward. Nothing worth living for can be had without pain and cost and struggle. Every step up the way to heaven is up-hill, and steep besides. Heaven always keeps above us, no matter how far we climb up toward it. However long we have been climbing, and whatever height we have reached, there are always other victories to win, other heights to gain. We shall never get to the top of the ladder until our feet are on heaven's threshold.

This wonderful vision-ladder was radiant with angels. We are not alone in our toilsome climbing. We have the companionship and ministry of strong friends we have never seen. Besides, the going up and coming down of these celestial messengers told of communication never interrupted between God and those who are climbing up the ladder. There is never a moment, nor any experience, in the life of a true Christian, from which a message may not instantly be sent up to God, and back to which help may not instantly come. God is not off in heaven merely, at the top of the long, steep life-ladder, looking down upon us as we struggle upward in pain and tears. As we listen, we hear him speak to the sad, weary man who lies there at the foot of the stairway, and he says: "Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest; I will not leave thee." Not angel championship alone, precious as it is, is promised, but Divine companionship also, every step of the toilsome way, until we get home. It is never impossible, therefore, for any one to mount the ladder to the very summit; with God's strong, loving help the weakest need never faint nor fail.

CHILDREN'S MEETINGS.

BY MRS. W. F. CRAFTS.

The great work to be accomplished for the young cannot be done during the one hour and a half a week that makes up the Sunday-school session.

"Train the children in temperance," says some friend of law and order. "There is no time for it," answers the Sunday-school teacher. "Teach the Catechism," says another. "No time for it," answers the Sunday-school teacher. "Teach the children how to read the Bible with relish," says another. The teacher replies: "I have time only for the lesson, and oftener than otherwise the superintendent's bell rings before I am half through." "Teach the children to pray audibly, and so train them for future usefulness in the prayer-meeting." "No opportunity for that," answers the Sunday-school teacher. "Teach the children about the ordinances and sacraments of the church." "I think I should," says the teacher, "but the time is too short."

The superintendent is perplexed. He says: "I recognize the desirability of doing all of these things for our

Sunday-school scholars, and even more. I want them to know about the Bible as a book. They should be trained to turn readily to any part named. They should be made familiar with its wonderful history. I have tried in what are called 'supplemental lessons,' or 'memory episodes,' to give instruction in some of these things; but five or ten minutes a week do not give one sufficient time for them. I have often wished that our pastor might instruct the children in these matters." The pastor replies: "I aim to do some of these things in my five-minute sermons to boys and girls; but I know that in five minutes a week I can hardly begin to do what should be done, and, besides, the church service is not a favorable time or place in which to drill the children. I have thought that we must depend largely upon the homes to do this work that you speak of; but then I remember that we have many children of un-Christian parents in our Sunday-school, and that Christian teaching, particularly of the more spiritual truths, is very scantily given in some of the Christian homes from which our scholars come."

The mother speaks: "It is so long from Sunday to Sunday that I think my children seem to forget the good they learn in Sunday-school. I would take them to the evening prayer-meeting with me, but they get so tired and sleepy I cannot feel that they get much good. I have insisted several times upon their going, and have kept them awake by sly pinches and whispered threatenings. They complain that they do not understand what is said. I have often wished there might be children's meetings in the middle of the week."

Yes, a children's meeting in the middle of the week. That will meet the want felt by all who are sharing in the religious training of the young,—the teacher, the superintendent, the pastor, and the mother.

CAN IT BE MADE A SUCCESS?

Has any one ever tried it? Will the children come? Children will flock to any place that is made bright and interesting. The idea of having a meeting all their own will of itself please them. In reply to the question, Has any one ever tried it? I would refer to what is called the "Monday Class" of the North Avenue Congregational Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts. It has been carried on for several years, under the leadership of Mrs. Frank Foxcroft, with an average attendance of a hundred and ten boys and girls. The leader says: "Most of the boys and girls naturally are from the families worshipping in the church where the meetings are held; but these bring their schoolmates, without any thought of denominational lines, and all are made welcome." In our own church, a children's meeting has been regularly held for more than three years on Wednesday afternoons for an hour just after school. The children come to the meeting in their school clothes, with books and lunch-baskets on their arms. Those who recognize the duty of the church to nurture those born in its own household rejoice greatly in this meeting. Still other children's meetings might be described as proof that such meetings may be successfully carried on.

How shall the meetings be conducted? The Monday Class, to which reference has been made before, is carried on somewhat after the following manner, as seen by an eye-witness: "It is held in a bright, prettily carpeted room, the walls being adorned with pictures, the chairs being arranged in semi-circular rows. The leader came in advance of the boys and girls, and spent the time, while they were gathering, in chatting with this one and that about school, play, etc. The leader tried to find the impression, if any, which had followed the boys and girls through the week, of the leading thought of the previous meeting. She had also given out some questions the week before, and the answers were brought on slips of paper. I noticed that the teacher reserved about forty or fifty seats in the front and centre for boys in whom the fun-loving element was the strongest. The teacher looked at her watch, and said, 'It is time now for our meeting to begin. We will wait a moment, until there is perfect quiet.' A little whisper in one corner of the room led the teacher to say, 'If there is any one who is not willing to give up talking, he may be excused now.' Absolute quiet followed, while the young folks went rapidly through various questions and answers of general topics of Bible history and geography. After about ten minutes, the leader asked the topic of the meeting. 'Absalom, the headstrong boy,' was the answer from nearly all, showing that they had felt interest enough to look up the subject in their list at home. Then followed a vivid description of Absalom's course, and the grief of his father, David. Then the lesson was applied, and a brief, gentle talk was given upon the importance of making a right choice; the teacher's voice being quiet