

THIS WEEK'S SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

THE DIGNITY OF WORK

(Lesson for October 31)
Golden Text — Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men.—Prov. 22:29

THE LESSON AS A WHOLE

By J. C. Macaulay, D.D.

Approach to the Lesson

Read again the Approach for the last two lessons, and then notice where each of our lesson portions is found.

Our first portion (Prov. 6:6-11) is in the second division of the Book (1:7 to 9:18), which consists, not of pure proverbs, but of brief discourses. Here we have an encouragement to industry, based on the habits of the ant.

Our single verse portion (18:9) is in the first group of proverbs of Solomon (10:1 to 22:16). As we might expect, it is more nearly a true proverb, but of the parallel type, not the more common adverb type.

The final portion of our lesson (24:30-34) is part of the section containing the second group of "the sayings of the wise ones" (24:23-34). Here again, as we saw, the form is looser, more nearly approaching that used in the earlier part of the Book. In keeping with this, our portion deals entirely with the subject of sloth, beginning with a description of the sluggard's field and vineyard, and proceeding to a warning of coming disaster.

This brings us to a problem. Compare 6:10, 11 and 24:33, 34. You will notice that the wording is identical in the English. We have seen that the authorship of the section in which 6:10, 11 is found has not been finally established, although we gave reasons last week for

believing that Solomon wrote at least part of it. (See note on 4:3, 4 in Verse by Verse.) But 24:33, 34 is part of the work of "the wise ones." Now how does it come that Solomon appended this warning to a description of the industry of the ant, while "the wise ones" used the same expressions following a description of a neglected field? Some suggest that 24:33, 34 is the insertion of an editor. That is the easy way out. It could have been composed by Solomon, and included in the anthology of "sayings of the wise ones," or it could have been quoted by Solomon from an earlier collection. It could also have been current in popular lore, and used by both Solomon and the school of the wise. However, the problem is one of literary criticism, and need not trouble us. The inspiration of the Scriptures is concerned with the accurate recording of all that the Holy Spirit willed to include, so that, whoever first composed this vivid warning, both Solomon and the wise ones were moved by the Holy Spirit to include it in their counsels. That satisfies me.

Verse by Verse
Prov. 6:6—"Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways." After dealing with the danger of suretyship (vs. 1-5) the writer turns to the ruinous vice of sloth, and appeals to the ant for a parable of the opposite virtue, industry.

Verse 7—"... no guide, overseer, or ruler." The word "guide" here seems to signify a military commander; "overseer" means literally "scribe," but is used of the task-masters in Egypt; "ruler" is a prince. A few species of ants have slaves, but ordinarily the work-

ers and soldiers act spontaneously, without leadership.

Verse 8—"Provideth her meat... in the harvest." Reference is to the harvesting ant, common in the Mediterranean region. The agricultural ant of Texas has similar habits.

Verse 9—"How long wilt thou sleep... Based on this example of industry, the man of sloth is exhorted to rouse himself from his ruinous slumber.

Verse 10—"... sleep... slumber... folding of the hands..." Here we have the sleepy monologue of the sluggard, half drugged by the drowsy effects of overmuch sleep. It is always "a little more," but the little multiplies till ruin overtakes the unwary.

Verse 11—"So shall thy poverty come... as an armed man." Notice the contrast. Verse 10 is slow motion, for sure, but here is action, relentless action. Poverty arrives suddenly, as one arrives from a journey, and with the merciless violence of the bandit. The Greek version takes "traveller" here in an evil sense, as a highwayman.

Chap. 18:9—"... slothful... brother to... a great waster." Impudence is the common parent of sloth and waste, and the offspring of both is want.

Chap. 24:30—"... the field of the slothful... the vineyard of the man void of understanding." What a man is will reflect in the condition of what he is responsible to care for. Field and vineyards, gardens and kitchens, are mute but eloquent witnesses.

Verse 31—"... all grown over with thorns... the stone wall thereof was broken down." Marks of neglect abound in the domain of the slothful—weeds growing unchecked and walls crumbling for lack of care.

Verse 32—"Then I... re-

ceived instruction." Just as the ant preached its sermon on the virtue of industry in chapter 6, so here the woeful condition of the lazy man's possession had its sorrowful lesson to teach. Happy are we if we have eyes and minds and hearts open to learn the lessons which abound for us on every hand.

The Heart of the Lesson
There are more ways than one of coming to want. Two of these ways are presented in the verse which stands by itself in our lesson (Prov. 18:9)—sloth and waste. The sluggard is the one who will not bestir himself to secure the necessities of life, while the waster is the one who foolishly and extravagantly uses up and dissipates what he has. In our text they are called brothers, not for any love that binds them together, but because they simply express two aspects of a common vice, improvidence. The offspring of both are so much alike that they go by the same name, Want.

Of these two brothers, sloth is the one mostly dealt with in our lesson. The subject is approached positively and negatively, first by an illustration of industry, drawn from nature, and then by an illustration of negligence, drawn from personal observation. In the sixth chapter the sluggard is challenged by the example of the tiny creature, the ant, which needs no prodding, no commanding, no threatening, but goes to work with eagerness and spontaneity to add to the general store of the nest. Not content to satisfy the hunger of the moment, these little creatures lay up store against the time when the fields will not yield them what they need. The most superficial observer cannot but notice the tireless industry of the ant, which will frequently carry and drag loads

bigger and heavier than itself.

But the sluggard is not easily aroused. He is not easily shamed into action. Ease is the sweetest luxury he knows, and he must always have a little more — always a little more, but the little grows to much. The lazy fellow always intended to arouse himself before want crept up on him. But want does not creep; it springs upon the sluggard with all the suddenness and irresistibility of a highway robber. The sleep of the sluggard is indeed costly.

In chapter 24 the question is approached from another angle. The writer has come upon the field and vineyard of a sluggard. Here was his inheritance, passed on to him from his industrious father. But work is not to his liking. Soon the field is full of thistles and nettles, the walls of the vineyard are crumbling, and the vines are grown out of control for want of pruning. The owner is indulging his "yet a little sleep, a little slumber," heedless of the ruinous state of his possessions, ignorant that poverty and want are about to leap upon him without mercy.

The man who will heed neither the example of industry nor the deteriorating condition of his own affairs can have only one end—stark desolation.

If this is true in worldly affairs, surely there is an application for us in the affairs of the Kingdom of God. We have been left here to "occupy" till our Lord comes. "Blessed is that servant whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. 24:46). Here also industry brings large recompense, both now and then, while sloth takes its terrible toll, both of spiritual condition here, and of eternal reward there.

Complaints General

At 1840 Test

At one of the first plowing matches of which there is record in any farm publication, both the committee and some of the plowmen were dissatisfied. This was the plowing match held in connection with the fair at Rochester, N.Y., in 1840. A report in the Genesee Farmer says:

The committee deems it proper to observe that several circumstances were quite unfavorable to the performance. In the first place the land was not suitable for the purpose, being stoney and uneven, although it was said to be the best obtainable near the city.

In the second place, the circumstances by which the committee were to be governed in giving their decisions were not pointed out by the officers of the society and some dissatisfaction may have grown out of their decisions, as some competitors seemed to suppose the length of time employed was of more importance than the quality of the work; and on the other hand some appeared to pay no regard to time but were particular to do the work well.

At this match each was given one-quarter acre to plow. The quality of the work is numbered one to eight set up in a schedule.

First prize went to a man who completed his land in 44 minutes and did No. 2 quality work. Second went to a man who finished in 40 minutes and did No. 3 quality.

Some plowmen regarded the width and depth of the furrow of the greatest importance. A reader writing a letter to the editor complained that the judges did not follow the practice observed in all plowing matches in Europe and state what kind of plowing was required. He complained that the plowing was judged by the speed with which it was done and not its excellence.

"Had I understood that the prize was to be awarded to the workman who could pare the most land in the shortest time, I could have prepared an instrument for this purpose to pare half an acre (though not plow it) in my sense of the word) in half the time it was

It's bad to act like a fool but it's worse when you're not acting.

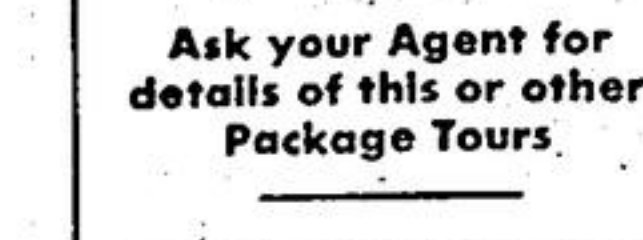
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accomplished. "But till the Rochester judges set me right," he said, "I had conceived that good plowing consisted in the furrow being laid at the proper angle with the red edge quite straight so that a 10-foot pole applied from the ridge to the furrow shall touch every furrow edge." Evidently the committee had the strikeouts made beforehand and this farmer didn't like that either.

W. P. Mulock Leaves Estate Of \$1,350,000

The estate of W.P. Mulock, grandson of the late Sir William, was valued at \$1,350,000 last week. Mr. Mulock's will was entered for probate by the Canada Permanent Trust. Of the estate \$500,000 was in stocks, the rest in real estate, mainly in downtown Toronto and the 910-acre Mulock farm near Newmarket. The farm was left to Mr. Mulock's son Tom. The balance of the estate was left to Mr. Mulock's widow, passing on to the two children after her death. Succession duties are estimated at \$185,000.

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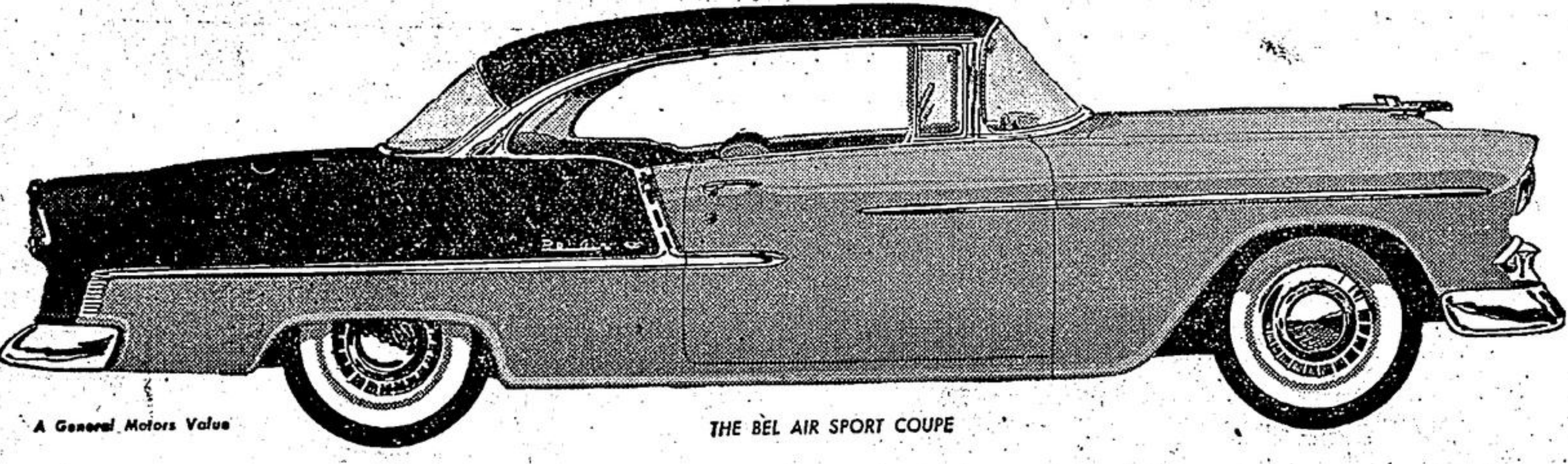
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6

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