

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876. INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, November 5th, 1876.—Saul's Conversion.—Acts ix. 1-18.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 17, 18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"A new heart also will I give you."—Ezekiel xxxvi. 26. (See whole verse.)

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxii. 1-16. Tuesday, Philippians iii. 4-14. Wednesday, Matthew xxv. 34-46. Thursday, Matthew xvii. 1-5. Friday, 2 Cor. xi. 23-27. Saturday, 1 Cor. xv. 1-10. Sunday, 1 Tim. i. 12-17.

ANALYSIS.—I. Saul's cruel errand. Vs. 1, 2. II. Christ appears to him. Vs. 3-6. III. Brought to Damascus. Vs. 7-9. IV. Service of Ananias. Vs. 10-18.

EXPOSITION.—We turn from the desert road on the south of Palestine, to a desert road on the north; from the border of Arabia, near Gaza, to its border near Damascus. Our Scripture brings before us Saul's journey, vision, seclusion, and baptism. In Lessons I-III we saw the judges judged; in this we see the arrester arrested. Yet the end is not bare wrath, but love; not ruin, but salvation. See parallel accounts in xxii. 1-16; xxvi. 9-18.

I. The Journey. Verse 1.—Yet. At and immediately after Stephen's martyrdom (viii. 3). Breathing out threatenings and slaughter. A happier translation is "breathing menace and murder." The whole inner man, the spirit of the man, was "menace and murder," and his breath was laden with these. Against the disciples of the Lord. This both explains the reason, and designates the objects of Saul's hate. It was no personal quarrel, it was religious zeal, zeal for God's honor, as he understood, or rather misunderstood it. xxvi. 9. Went unto the high-priest. Showing that Saul himself was the prime mover and leading spirit in the persecution, and that he was not merely drawn into it by others. As the Sanhedrim gave the letter (vs. 14; xxvi. 10; xxii. 5), Saul naturally applied to the high-priest, who was its president. See v. 17, 27.

Verse 2.—Letters to Damascus. Write authorizing him to make arrests in Damascus. This city "has at present 250,000 inhabitants, of whom 70,000 are Christians of the Greek and Syrian Churches," the rest Moslems. On its early history, see Gen. xv. 2; xiv. 15; 2 Sam. viii. 6; 1 Kings xi. 24; Isa. vii. 8; Amos i. 3, 5. It is on the highway of travel between the East and the West. It is called by Julian "the eye of the East," and by Lamartine a "predestinated capital." Of this way. The Christian mode or "way" of faith and practice. Men or women. This indicates probably not alone the extremity of Saul's wrath and measures, but also the number and influence of Christian women. Comp. viii. 3; xxii. 4.

Verse 3.—Came near Damascus. Doubtless, therefore, in sight of it, and after some five days' travel. See above on vs. 2. From the other accounts in chaps. xxii, xxvi, we learn that the vision was witnessed about noon.

II. The Vision. Verse 3.—Suddenly there shined, etc. For suddenness of appearance like a lightning's flash. On the ineffable brightness of this light, see xxii. 6 and xxvi. 13, which, however, can be adequately understood only by one "who has had experience of the glare of a mid-day sun in the East."

Verse 4.—Fell to the earth. Lyttleton, in his Observations on St. Paul's Conversion, uses the phrase, "Those in company with him fell down from their horses, together with Saul." Heard a voice. 1 Cor. ix. 1. The affair was not confined to Saul's mind. Light and sound were external and sensible. Saul, Saul. A personal call, but not more true than every call of Jesus to both impenitent and disciple. Rom. xiv. 12. Why persecutest thou me? Jesus identifies himself with his disciples, as in Matt. xxv. 31-46; John xv. 1-6, and elsewhere. In Saul's purpose and feeling it was hatred of Jesus that controlled him, just as truly as it controlled Christ's crucifiers. He knew that Christ was Christianity.

Verse 5.—Who art thou, Lord? Saul well knew that light and fire were the wonted symbols and tokens of God's special presence in olden times. His questions, in reply to Christ's question, must be understood in the light of that

fact. I am Jesus. Purposely giving that Nazarene name which, was to the Sanhedrim so hateful. Whom thou persecutest, Art persecuting; that is, even now on this journey, and while gazing, like the eagle, on the helpless prey in the near city. Kick against the pricks. The ox in kicking the goads hurts himself the more, the more he kicks. So must Saul know that he is fighting against God.

Verse 6.—Trembling and astonished. No wonder! In the very presence of the Lord of glory, face to face. Ah, what a change. How sudden, how mighty! How prophetic of the revelations of "that day!" What wilt thou have me to do? A changed man! Converted; rebellion ended; submission declared; persecution renounced; service accepted; Jesus enthroned, and the will of Jesus henceforth, and forever, his supreme and only law. A change of heart, repentance, experienced in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye. Thus is it in every convert's case, but not so manifestly and demonstrably. Arise, and go into the city, etc. In xxvi. 16-19, the substance of Christ's message, as conveyed by Ananias, seems, for brevity, to be given as though spoken by Christ himself at the time of his appearance on the way.

Verse 7.—Stood. May refer to the cessation of motion without reference to position, as in viii. 38. All fell to the ground, xxvi. 14. Hearing a voice. The sound of it, but not so as to understand it, xxii. 9.

III. The Seclusion. The blindness served to shut him in to himself and his Lord. The excess of light had blinded him.

IV. The Baptism. Verse 10.—Ananias. Not otherwise known; but in xxii. 12 commended.

Verse 11.—Straight. "There is still a street of this name in Damascus, about one-half mile in length, running east and west." Inquire in the house, etc. Compare x. 6, and that whole account with this. He prayeth. Truly prayest, and to the Lord Jesus then speaking. Vs. 14. A genuine characteristic of a Christian.

Verse 12.—Hath seen, etc. Each prepared for his part.

Verse 13, 14.—Objection; natural, yet needless. It shows that Christians here were well posted on Saul's dealings with Christians.

Verse 15, 16.—A chosen vessel. Ananias is not rebuked, but relieved of his fear. Saul, as Paul, magnified electing grace. Before the Gentiles. Better fitted because of his intense Hebrew zeal. Kings. Dr. Hackett here notes that he testified "before the governors of Cyprus, Achaia, and Judea, and before Herod Agrippa, and probably Nero." The children of Israel. He always went first to the Jews. xiii. 36. I will show him, etc. By his future experience. The persecutor became the persecuted.

Verse 17.—Immediate, and glad obedience. Brother Saul. A Christian brother.

Verse 18.—Arose. And if there was not sufficient water in the court, went out. Was baptized. Was immersed.

QUESTIONS.—Where was Saul born? Of what tribe was he? What trade was he taught? Where was he educated? At whose feet? Did he take any part in Stephen's trial and martyrdom? How old was he then? How did he show his persecuting spirit after Stephen's death? Chap. viii. 3.

Vs. 2. Where was Damascus? Abraham had a steward from Damascus: what was his name? Gen. xv. 2. Why did Paul desire "letters to Damascus?" 2 Cor. xi. 32. What makes it probable that there were Christians in Damascus? Acts ii. 9, 10, 11. What year of our Lord was this journey taken?

Vs. 3. How bright was this light? At what time of day was its appearance? Chap. xxvi. 13. Where was it from? What was such an appearance usually called? Ex. xvi. 7, 10. Was the Lord Jesus ever before encompassed with glory? Matt. xvii. 1-5.

Vs. 4. Did Saul understand what the voice uttered? Did his companions?

Vs. 5. Did Saul know it was Jesus who spoke to him at first? Was he many seconds in doubt? Did he not at this time see as well as hear Jesus? What is conversion? Ans. A change of disposition.—Andrew Fuller. Who produces it? John i. 13; Rom. viii. 9; 1 Cor. vi. 11. Is conversion necessary to us? Matt. xviii. 3.

Vs. 13. In what sense are Christians called "saints" now? 1 Cor. iii. 16, 17.

Vs. 15. Did Paul understand himself to be an apostle to the Gentiles? Rom. xi. 13; xv. 16; Gal. i. 15, 16.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, November 12th, 1876.—Saul's early Ministry.—Acts ix. 19-30.

YOUTH'S DEPARTMENT.

The Little Beggar.

A ragged, sad-eyed boy, aged nine or ten, stopped me on the street the other day, and said:

"I haven't had anything to eat this whole day. Won't you please give me two cents?"

I gave it to him. I'd have given him the money, if it had been necessary to pawn my hat.

"Do you let impostors swindle you in that manner?" inquired an acquaintance, who had seen every phase of human life. Men, women and children have swindled him, or sought to; people have lied to him; his money has been given to whining, lying vagrants, who told direful tales of distress, and he ought to be able to correctly read human nature.

"I'll bet that boy is a professional beggar," continued my friend, chuckling at the idea of my being swindled.

"None of us care for the loss of a shin-plaster on the street, while every one feels vexed and annoyed at the idea of being swindled out of a single penny. I could not say that the boy was not a swindler, and yet I would have divided my last shilling with him."

"Why?" I told my friend why, and I will tell you. One day last year, when the wild wind blew the snow over the house roofs and around the corners in blinding clouds, and when the frosty air cut one's face like a knife, a boy of ten came up to me as I waited for the car. He was thinly clad, and his face betrayed hunger and suffering, and in a mournful voice he pleaded:

"I'm hungry and cold!"

"Why don't you go home?" I asked.

"I haven't any!"

"Haven't you any relatives?"

"Not one!"

"How long have you been here?"

"Three weeks!"

The boy spoke in that drawl which professional beggars assume. I believed, too, that I had seen his face on the streets time and again. I hardened my heart and said:

"Boy! I know you, and if I catch you asking any one for money again I'll have you arrested."

He moved away quickly. I argued that this proved his guilt, forgetting that a homeless waif might evince fear when entirely innocent.

Five hours later, when night had come, and the wind had grown to a fierce gale, the boy halted me again, as I plunged through the snow drifts. I did not see him until he called out:

"Mister! I'm almost starved, and I'll freeze to death if I can't get some place to sleep!"

The same thin, ragged clothes, hardly comfortable enough for June weather—same whine to his voice. I felt like giving him money, but the fear that he had been sent out by his parents to beg, restrained and angered me. Catching him by the arm, I yelled out:

"See here, boy! If you don't own up that you're lying to me, I'll take you to the station!"

Through the blinding storm I saw his white face grow paler, and he cried back:

"Don't take me—don't! Yes. I was lying!"

I released him and he hurried away, while I walked on, flattering myself that I had played a sharp game, and done the general public a good turn.

An hour later, when the night had grown still wilder and colder, some one knocked at my door. It was a timid knock, and I wondered who could have sent a child abroad on such a night.

When I opened the door, the same boy was on the step, his face blue with cold, his whole form shivering, and a look of desperation in his eyes.

"Please, Mister!"—he began, but stopped, upon recognizing me.

I was puzzled to know why he should have followed me home—why he had selected me for a victim and galled me so persistently. I might have argued that the storm had driven people off the streets, and that the freezing, starving boy had, in his desperation, called at the house. Had it been any other person asking charity I would have given promptly and freely. But I was angry at his trailing me—angered that he thought he could swindle me, and grabbed at him and inquired:

"Boy, what is your name?"

He leaped back, and standing where the furious storm almost buried him from sight, he answered:

"Gil."

"I know you, sir!" I shouted, and he moved away without another word.

May the Lord forgive me for that night's work! but you might have acted the same. When morning came, after a night so bitter that the policemen were frozen on their beats, I opened the front door to find that boy dead on the steps, frozen to death! I knew, as the dead white face looked up at me through the snow, that I had wronged him with my suspicions, but it was too late then; the angels had opened to him a gate leading to a place, where the human heart and its unworthy thoughts can never enter.

Poor Gil! A warm meal or a shilling would have saved his life, and I drove him out to his death!

This is why I give when I am asked now. I know that I sometimes give to the unworthy, but it would be better to give all I possessed to an impostor, than to have another homeless waif creep back to die on the spot where I had unjustly accused him.—Vermont Chronicle.

The Leisure Time of Boys.

Every father of a family knows that there is a time in the life of his sons that gives him much trouble and some anxiety. We allude to the period of boyhood, when exuberance of spirits and thoughtlessness are at their height, and when the studies imposed by school discipline are entirely insufficient to find adequate employment for their too active minds and bodies. And it is not possible, or even desirable, to increase the already considerable application of all well bred boys to the study of books and the acquirement of learning. It is not to be wished that a youth of twelve should grow up to be a conceited would-be pedant of twenty, and a book-worm at thirty years of age. Thus the task of finding fitting occupation for the leisure hours of a boy is no inconsiderable one, as few pursuits into which a boy would plunge with eagerness are suited for putting in the way of so much impulsiveness and want of consideration as most boys possess. The question, then, of how to amuse our boys, is one of paramount importance and difficulty.

We would suggest to the many parents who have been perplexed with this difficulty, to give their lads every possible opportunity of acquiring a mechanical trade. The industry and ingenuity of a boy of average ability may easily be made to furnish him with a never failing source of amusement of the best order. The boy who can produce or make something already begins to feel that he is somebody in the world, that achievement of a result is not a reward reserved for grown people only. And the education of mind, eye, and hand, which the use of tools and mechanical appliances furnishes, is of a great and real value, beyond the good resulting from the occupation of leisure time. Having nothing to do is as great a snare to the young as it is to the full grown; and no greater benefits can be conferred on youths than to teach them to convert time now wasted, and often worse than wasted, into pleasant means of recreation and mental improvement.

We say, therefore, to all parents: Provide your boys with mechanical apparatus and tools. There is no greater pleasure to most boys than the handling of a tool; and many great men and ingenious inventors look back with gratitude and delight to the day when they were first allowed to use the lathe, the saw, and the plane.

The boy, whose time and mind are now occupied with marbles and kite, may be a Watt, a Morse, or a Bessemer in embryo; and it is certainly an easy matter to turn his thoughts and musings into a channel which shall give full scope to their faculties. And to most boys the use of mechanical tools is the most fascinating of all occupations.

As logic and mathematics have a value beyond accuracy in argument and correct solution of problems, in that they teach men the habit of using their reflecting powers systematically, so carpentry, turning, and other arts of high importance. These occupations teach boys to think, to proceed from initial causes to results, and not only to understand the nature and duty of the me-

chanical powers, but to observe their effects; and to acquire knowledge by actual experiment, which is the best way of learning anything. All the theories culled out of books leaves an impress on the mind and memory which is slight compared to that of the practical experience of the true mechanic.

Our advice is, to all who have the great responsibility of the charge of boys: Give them a lathe, or a set of carpenter's or even blacksmith's tools. Give their minds a turn towards the solid and useful side of life. You will soon see the result in increased activity of their thinking capabilities, and the direction of their ideas towards practical results; and, still more obviously, in the avoidance of idle mischief and nonsense (to omit all reference to absolute wickedness and moral degradation), which are, to too great an extent, the pastime of the generation which is to succeed us.—Scientific American.

Is your Note good.

A Boston lawyer on School street, was called upon a short time ago by a boy who inquired if he had any waste paper to sell. The lawyer has a crisp, keen way of asking questions, and is, moreover, a more methodical man. So pulling out the lower drawer, he exhibited his stock of waste paper, laid smoothly in, sheet after sheet, a solid mass.

"Will you give me twenty-five cents for that?"

"Done," said the lawyer, and the paper was quickly transferred to the bag by the boy, whose eyes sparkled as he hefted the heavy mass.

"Not till it was safely stowed away did he announce that he had no money."

"No money! How do you expect to buy paper without money?"

Not prepared to state exactly his plan of operations, the boy made no reply.

"Do you consider your note good?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; if you say your note is good, I'd just as soon have it as the money; but if it isn't good, I don't want it."

The boy affirmed that he considered it good, whereupon the lawyer wrote a note for fifteen cents, which the boy signed legibly, and lifting his bag of paper trudged off.

Soon after dinner the little fellow reappeared, and producing the money, announced that he had come to take up the note.

"Well," said the lawyer, "This is the first time I ever knew a note taken up the day it was given, a boy who will do that is entitled to note and money too," and giving him both, sent him on his way with a smiling face and a happy heart.

This boy's note represented his honor. A boy who thus keeps his honor bright, however poor he may be in worldly things, is an heir to an inheritance which no riches can buy—the choice promises of God.

Harry's Peaches.

Two rosy peaches as big as Harry's little hands could hold, and he came in with them, feeling very proud, indeed.

"Look, mamma, dear," he said.

"I see," she replied. "Will you give me one?"

"I want them both myself," he said.

"What, both? Don't want your dear mother to have one when you have two? Well, never mind. Somebody else will give peaches to mamma."

Mamma set Harry's chair by the table, and gave him her fruit-knife. He was very much pleased when he had the pretty silver knife to use.

"Now dear," she said, "eat all yourself, and try to enjoy them."

She turned her face away, and went on with her sewing. But Harry found that they did not taste good. Selfishness is a bitter sauce. Before long he felt ashamed, and ran to his mother, begging her to share his fruit with him.

When, after some persuasion, she consented, he felt happy again.—Christian at Work.

Tommy—Who has been allowed a seat at the table on the occasion of a tea-party and is scrutinizing the engraving on the teaspoon, which is odd—Why, mother, these spoons were on Aunt Jane's supper-table the other night, when cousin Fred had his party. A "look" from the maternal, and a smile all around.