

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES. SUNDAY, December 24th, 1876.—Theme for special review: The early converts. A. D. 30-45.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: 2 Corinthians v. 17. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

GOLDEN TEXT.—"A little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation: I the Lord will hasten it in his time." Isaiah xl. 22.

MONDAY. The "Three Thousand" at Pentecost. (a.) Convicted of sin. (b.) Converted. (c.) Baptized. (d.) Orderly walk. Acts ii. 36-47.

TUESDAY. Obedient "Priests" when the "Seven" were Chosen. Believing the Gospel. (a.) On its incontestable miracles. Acts iv. 13-22. (b.) On its strict discipline. Acts v. 1-11. (c.) On its evident unselfishness. Acts iv. 32-37.

WEDNESDAY. The Samaritans Receiving "the Word of God." (a.) Under Philip's ministry. Acts viii. 1-8. (b.) Under Peter's approval. Acts viii. 14-17. (c.) Simon Magus insincere. Acts viii. 9-13; xviii. 25.

THURSDAY. The Ethiopian Treasurer of Candace. (a.) Devout. Acts viii. 26-28. (b.) Teachable. Acts viii. 19-35. (c.) Baptized. Acts viii. 36-39.

FRIDAY. Saul of Tarsus. (a.) At Stephen's martyrdom. Acts vii. 57-60. (b.) On his way to Damascus. Acts ix. 1-6. (c.) In Damascus baptized. Acts ix. 17-19. (d.) At Jerusalem. Acts ix. 23-30. (e.) In Antioch. Acts x. 25, 26.

SATURDAY. Cornelius. (a.) His prayers and alms. Acts x. 1-4. (b.) Coincident visions. Acts x. 3-16. (c.) Peter and Cornelius meet. Acts x. 17-46. (d.) Cornelius baptized. Acts x. 47, 48.

SUNDAY. Believers in Antioch. (a.) The result of the labor of unclaimed Christians. Acts xi. 19-21. (b.) Particularly of Barnabas. Acts xi. 22-24. (c.) The coming of Saul, the "chosen" of God. Acts xi. 25, 26; ix. 15. (d.) Disciples here "called Christians first." Acts xi. 26.

QUESTIONS FOR CLASSES FOR QUICK ANSWERS.—Monday.—Who was the preacher at Pentecost? What made this preacher so bold at this time? Why does the preaching of the crucifixion convince men of sin? What two things did Peter tell the inquirers at Pentecost to do? Why did he not say, "Be baptized and repent"? After their baptism, how did the converts show the genuineness of their conversion?

Tuesday.—It seems that a few of the hundreds of priests in Jerusalem were converted; on what three evidences did they receive the Gospel? What lame man had been healed? What hypocrites had been punished? How? What unselfishness had the early Church shown?

Wednesday.—Under whose labors were the Samaritans converted? Who confirmed these Samaritans in the faith? What hypocrite here also was rebuked? Is it the fault of Christianity that some bad men get into the churches of Christ?

Thursday.—What way was the Ethiopian going when Philip met him? What was he doing? Where was he reading? And about whom? How was his teachable spirit manifest? How his obedience?

Friday.—Where in Scripture does Saul first appear? What was the object of his errand to Damascus? Who met him in the way? Where and by whom was he baptized? What region did he afterward visit? Why did he hurry from Damascus? Where then did he go? Where then? Where have we last seen him?

Saturday.—How had Cornelius shown his piety before he had his vision? What was he told to do? Who besides him had a vision that same day? What was it? What was Peter to understand by it? Was Cornelius baptized? After he had received what?

Sunday.—Must a man be "ordained" to preach the Gospel? Acts xi. 19. Are not some set apart of God, however, to this holy work? Acts ix. 15. Where were the early converts first called Christians?

EXPOSITION.—The Day of Pentecost. This inaugurated the Dispensation of the Spirit, under which we still live. Its characteristics are given in the first and second chapters of Acts.

- 1. It is purely spiritual in its nature.
2. It is characterized by a supernatural gift.
3. The dispensation is one of power.
4. It is characterized by its purifying influence.
5. In this new era, Divine influence should hold us in its overmastering control.
6. This is an age of individual responsibilities and qualifications.
7. The dispensation is characterized by emotion and earnestness. Those

tongues of fire bespoke the heaven-given energy, fiery intensity, the burning love with which the Gospel should be preached.

8. It is marked by its relation to speech. The Pentecostal miracle of tongues does not seem to have been continued as a means of preaching the Gospel, but was wrought for its symbolic significance. Thus is religion linked to speech.

The Early Christian Church. 1. We see the men gathered into Christ's fold. They were first converted under Peter's preaching, who charged upon his hearers their guilt in the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom yet he presented to them as their Saviour, to be thus accepted. Self-condemned and alarmed, they cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" So ever, the work of the law precedes that of the Gospel. To conversion succeeded baptism. The converts were at once baptized. Peter's short, sharp words were, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you." The inward change was to be accompanied by its outward sign. By baptism they were to profess Christ's name, and pledge themselves to his service.

2. Came the development of the new life.
3. The devout life of believers. (1) They were much together. (2) No peculiarity was more striking than "their bountiful charity one toward another." This, however, did not involve a complete community of goods. (3) They faithfully observed the public religious ordinances. (4) Distinctly noted is the religious joyfulness of their private and domestic life.

The Healing Power. 1. Its necessity. Men have rebelled and wandered, corrupted and destroyed themselves. Hence their need of restoration, the redemptive scheme, calling into exercise the power of Jesus, pre-supposes the fact of sin, of spiritual disease, of the ruin of men.

2. The healing—what? Man must beset right with God and his government. His manifold sins must be pardoned. His evil heart must be cleansed, regenerated, created anew in righteousness, and kept therein. But the power of Jesus is ample. Whom he cures he keeps.

3. Its efficiency—how secured? The sole condition for the exercise of Jesus' healing and saving power is faith on the part of the diseased and perishing. Just as a patient must trust himself to the physician's skill; just as the shipwrecked mariner must trust himself to the life-boat; just as a drowning man must trust himself to the arm reached for his rescue—so must the soul trust itself wholly to Christ.

4. Its efficacy—when secured? Now, at once. Like water in a reservoir, the power of Jesus is ever ready for instant use. Only let the demand be made, and it will be answered. "There is none other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved."

The Seven Chosen. The number seven was the sacred number of the Hebrews, and symbolized completeness. Viewing it in this sense, we may say that the diaconate, or helping department of the church, should be large enough to insure the greatest efficiency and completeness of service. The work has rather increased with the growing area of Christendom.

Philip and the Ethiopian. Of the many lessons suggested by this narrative, we shall confine ourselves to three.

1. It gives a key to the right understanding of important portions of Scripture. Christ, the propitiation for sin, the anchor of the soul, the support of a holy life, is the magic key which unlocks the best treasures of God's word.

2. It suggests some noteworthy conditions of successful Christian work. Though God gives the increase, certain conditions are to be fulfilled by us. (1.) One secret of Philip's success lay in what he was—"a man of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom." A man not of "honest report" in the market-place is no man to lift up his voice in a prayer-meeting. "Full of the Holy Ghost." Such have power with God and with men. They pray, and God hears them. They speak, and somehow the words go straight to the conscience and heart. "Of wisdom." Not a little well-meant Christian effort fails apparently for no better reason than that it lacks in timeliness, courtesy, patience—in many things, in-

deed, which Christian wisdom is quick to perceive and practice. Besides, Philip was whole-hearted. (2.) Another secret of success lay in the means used by him to bring men into the fold. Whether in Samaria or in the desert, Philip "preached."

3. We see the sure foundation of a returning sinner's hope. The anguish sought for the meaning of Scripture, and the ground of his trust. Philip pointed him to the Lamb of God, the Crucified One—the fulfillment of prophecy—on whom God had laid the iniquity of us all.

Happy is he who, like this African prince, gives himself no rest until he has found Christ, not only in the pages of the prophet, but as the joy of his life.

The Gospel to the Gentiles. The story of Peter and Cornelius, as contained in the Scripture of the Ninth and Tenth Lessons of the last quarter, show us—(1.) The thoroughness with which all ritualistic reliance vanishes. (2.) The certainty that, if it had been possible, the Gentiles would have been received at an earlier date. (3.) Our duty to carry the Gospel to all mankind.

Spread of the Gospel. From Lesson XI, of the last quarter, we learn—(1.) That Christianity triumphs through the power of the Holy Spirit working within men. (2.) That with this, and inseparable from it, goes the personal presence of the risen and ruling Saviour, according to his promise, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." And (3.) That these go with the declaration of the Gospel in its simplicity, its purity, its fullness, its adaptedness, and its power.

—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, December 31st, 1876.—Annual Review or Selection.

YOUTH'S DEPARTMENT.

Little Mary's Christmas Eve.

BY MARY E. BOGGS.

Christmas is really coming. And Santa Claus is out to-night! Even the winds are happy. Tossing the flakes so white. Of the beautiful, beautiful snow storm. Come quick to the window and see; I know you are only a Dolly. But then you can look with me, And we'll wonder if, up in heaven, The angels have stockings to fill, And whether good Santa Claus fills them. As they lie, in their cribs so still. Do you think they are chills for their pillows, And, instead of a candle's star? I am sure I would like to go up there. If it wasn't so very far. But Papa and Mamma would be lonely, And Carlo, and Popsy, and you—O how dear, darling Dolly, I couldn't let you go. You're a love in your mantle so new, But then, you must take it off now dear. And lie in your snug little bed; I will slip off your pretty silk stockings, And hang them right here at your head. Then I'll go to the chimney-corner, And call up to Santa Claus there, To bring you a muff and a bonnet, And a ribbon to tie in your hair. (Sings.) "So, sleep, sleep, little Dolly, Santa Claus always is kind. Sleep, sleep, little Dolly, Sleep till the black hours break; Sleep, sleep, little Dolly, And never till morning, awake." There! I've pulled the wire of her eyelids, And dolly is fast asleep; When Santa Claus comes in the night time, She won't get even a peep! But there isn't a spring to my own eyes, Nor a wire for Mamma to pull, Nor a bit of need of my sleeping. For to-morrow is no more school. So I'll jump into bed and cover, My eyes which are wide awake. And when Santa Claus comes down the chimney, A look at his virtues I'll take; And then if his face is gentle, And the way is all clear and right, I'll steal while he isn't thinking, And kiss him with all my might! But I haven't yet prayed to the Saviour, To ask him "my soul to keep; Yes, I'll pray; but, instead of "I lay me, PLEASE DON'T LET ME GO TO SLEEP!" For I want to see Kris! with his candles, And his pack that is full to the brim; And I'm sure that my prayer will be answered, So I'll sing him my new Christmas-hymn. I'll sing it over and over, To fill up the long, long time. Till I hear the tramp of the reindeer, And the bells with their merry chime. O, how, could I ever sleep through it, And only of Santa Claus dream? But I'm tired, so I'll just begin it, That dear little Christmas-hymn. (Sings.) "Jesus, the blessed Child-king, With a beautiful Christmas tree Has come to the earth from heaven, And the gifts of His love are free To the poorest child in the kingdom. To you, little stranger, and me. "Jesus the blessed Child-king, Holds flowers, in His loving hand, And the fragrance is scattered around Him, All over the wide-spread land; His service is sweet, and easy, "To love" is His one command. "Jesus, the blessed Child-king, Has stars in His tree, to light The way of the little pilgrims. To heaven—" I dream, I dream— G-O-O-D-N-I-G-H-T.

Christmas Joys and Memories.

BY MARGARET E. SANDSTEN.

The merriest person I ever saw, on a Christmas Day, was a poor black boy, in the South, about twelve years ago. Christmas had come to beautiful Virginia, not roysal in a mantle of ermine, but bowtching in almost Summer loveliness. The great hedges of box in the gardens, clipped and shaped in fantastic fashions, were as green as on a June day, and the roses were blooming in rich and generous profusion, crimson, and white, and golden-hearted, filling the air with their delicate fragrance. There were sounds, to Northern ears, as though three Fourth of July had been rolled into one, what with the footing of horns, the firing of cannon, the noise of fire-crackers, and the general joyous uproar with which the whole populace, and especially the negroes, welcomed the gala day of the year; for so Christmas is celebrated in the South. With the thoughtless prodigality which is a characteristic of the race, the colored people had prepared to celebrate Christmas, their highest festival and greatest annual event, and the money that would have paid rent and bought dinner, for some weeks, in many a poor family was lavished on fire-works and finery with careless abandon.

Sitting on a door step, all by himself, was the boy to whom I have referred. He had not a whole garment on, his forlorn and buttonless coat had lost a sleeve, and his torn shirt hardly covered his swarthy breast. His feet were bare, and on his woolly head was the tradition of something that at a remote period may have been a cap. In his thin hand, he held a tin whistle, upon which, from time to time, he performed rapturous solos, alternating them with various acrobatic feats in which his whole loose-jointed body gave vent to the ecstasy for which the whistle was insufficient.

"What makes you so glad, Jimmy?" I said, when out of sheer exhaustion the little fellow paused for breath. "Glad! Done, you know? It's Christmas!" was the reply, and the dusky velvet eyes lifted to mine in amazement of wonder and reproach. "It's Christmas, and 'TIS FULLER THAN I CAN HOLD!"

In something of this mood, intense, jubilant and thankful, we ought all to approach Christmas. It is the children's day, we say, looking back, half regretfully, to the days when we were children, and when through avenues of delicious mystery and enchanting anticipation we were led along to the Christmas-tide. But it was not for nothing that our Saviour once set a little child, with the sunlight on his clustering curls, and the light of love in his happy eyes, in the midst of the bearded disciples, with the sweet and solemn words: "Except ye become like little ye cannot enter the kingdom of heaven." We must have the child-heart, the child-hope, the child-faith and the child-love, if we would truly keep the feast of the King on the King's birthday. Yet, in the midst of world-cares and perplexities, in the vicissitudes of business, in the gloom of bereavement, and in the secret anxieties that vex our silent hours and drive sleep from our pillows, we forget, too often, not only how we felt when we were children, but that we ever were children at all. Heirs of a heavenly inheritance, we remember not the crowns to which we go; and it is a blessed thing for us that once a year there comes a day when we gather round the lowly couch where lay the Virgin Mother and the Babe Divine, and once more in our sight and hearing

"The Star rains its fire, While the beautiful sing: 'In the manger of Bethlehem Jesus is King.'"

Into our Christmas joy perhaps there enters a discordant note. Some one whose conscience is a troublesome in-conoclast, whispers in our ear: "You are not sure that Christ was born to-day. You are lending yourself to papal superstition, and departing from the simplicity of the reformed worship, when you wreath the Christmas greens, and give Christmas gifts, and sing Christmas carols." Such a one I remember with pity, who, in an excess of Protestant fervour, never has so good a dinner on Christmas as on other days, and usually takes it for the doing of some particularly disagreeable house-

hold work. No interchange of presents, no merry Christmas rushes, are allowed in that home on that day, but rather there settles down a weight of gloom that would have oppressed even Cromwell's glorious Ironsides. I can never be glad enough that there are

NO LITTLE CHILDREN IN THAT HOUSE, to be defrauded of children's delight in SANTA CLAUS, and to be forbidden to hang up their stockings. And yet, such might be there in the silken, soft touch of baby fingers, children might have won the old ascetic to enjoy a Christmas. It makes no difference whether the 25th of December be indeed, the day or not of our dear Redeemer's advent. For our loyal and loving hearts it is enough to know that Jesus came, and came a helpless little babe, cradled on a mother's breast. His name shall be called Jesus; he shall save his people from their sins; and by so much as we need salvation every day, our love goes forth to the Incarnate God who took upon him our nature, and who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. Troubled as we are, sometimes, lest we do not love enough the gentle and blessed One who wrought miracles, and taught in the temple, and who died on the cross, we never have any doubt at all as to our love for the Infant Jesus. Harder than flint, and colder than snow would be the heart that did not go out to embrace the beautiful child whom MARY held in her arms, while shepherds of Judea and wise men from the East brought their offerings, and knelt in adoration.

Christmas, as it comes to us in our homes, is a day to make each other happy. There is a peculiar fitness in keeping it by the exchange of gifts, the value of which is not to be estimated by the money it costs. A flower, a ribbon, a trifle, if loving hands bestow, and a loving heart receives, is worth far more than a splendid present that is dictated by a spirit of ostentatious display. A gift that is given for show loses the sweetness of its thought. Into our tokens of friendship, if there enter a little self-denial, if we have planned, unaided, and worked in secret, that we may give some darling a delightful surprise, that will be a purer aroma of affection about our Christmas Day.

HOW THE DAY MAY BE IMPROVED. It is a day to forgive injuries. In there in all the comprehensive forgiveness of the Lord's Prayer, a petition so hard as that, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." Thank God, he does not wait to pardon those from whom we are estranged. Yet, can we truly keep the Christmas feast, can we be in spirit with and like our dear Lord, if we harbor in our hearts on that sweet day, harsh and resentful memories of any who have offended us? Let us, "With malice toward none, with charity for all," enter the radiant portals of Christmas Day.

Christmas is a day for good beginnings, we have all lost windows, that we ought to have done, and done what we ought not to have done, in the twelve months just past; but wherefore for that reason shall we despair? Forgetting the things that are behind, let us press forward, trying more and more to make our path sunny and shiny. If we have not helped the burdened, or cheered the despondent, or comforted the lonely; if we have ourselves been selfish, or thoughtless, or unkind, let us mould our lives into another pattern for the year that is to come. Like Christ on Christmas Day, and like Christ every day, should be our wish, our thought, and our prayer. And so dear Jesus

Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord, What may my service be? Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word, But simply following Thee. The heart must ring thy Christmas bells, Thy inward altars raise— Its faith and hope thy canticles, And its obedience praise. —Christian at Work.

A country curate, in a letter to Blackwood's Magazine, says that on one occasion he baptized a child named "Acta." Afterward in the vestry he asked the good woman what made her choose such a name. Her answer was this: "Why, sir, we be religious people; we've got four on 'em already, and they be call'd Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and so my husband thought he'd compliment the Apostles a bit." To see what is right and not to do it, is want of courage.