

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, October 22nd, 1876.—Simon the Sorcerer.—Acts viii. 9-25.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 18-21.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Thy heart is not right in the sight of God."—Acts viii. 21.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts viii. 1-8. Tuesday, John iv. 35-38. Wednesday, 1 Timothy i. 12-17. Thursday, 1 Corinthians xiii. Friday, Ephesians ii. 11-22. Saturday, 2 Thessalonians ii. 1-10. Sunday, Genesis iv. 8-15.

ANALYSIS.—I. Simon's professed belief. Vs. 9-13. II. Peter and John in Samaria. Vs. 14-17. III. Hypocrisy exposed. Vs. 18-24. IV. Return to Jerusalem. Vs. 25.

EXPOSITION.—Magus means magician, or sorcerer. Hence, this Simon is usually called "Simon Magus," and thus distinguished from other Simons of Scripture. Our lesson presents him in four different characters, as sorcerer, church-member, office seeker, and convict. For the historical connection see vs. 1-8.

I. As Sorcerer.

Verse 9.—But there was, etc. The word translated "but" has here nearly the force of our now, connecting to what precedes an explanatory sentence or section. Beforetime. That is, Philip's coming, and for a long time before (verse 11), continuing till Philip's arrival (verses 11, 12). Giving out [saying] that he himself was some [a certain] great one. The expectation of a Coming One, of the Coming One of prophecy, was prevalent, and made such pretensions the more credible. The pretended greatness was supported by pretended wonders. Christ asserted the greatness that was his, and established it by words and works that were truth and genuineness.

Verse 10.—They all gave heed. All, not intending to affirm that there was no single exception. Luke strongly asserts the prevalence of the deception. From the least unto the greatest. "Both young and old." Compare Hebrews viii. 11; Jeremiah xlii. 1; xlii. 12; Revelation xx, 12, etc. This man is the great power of God. Their faith was real, though its object was spurious. It led them to trust in him, and so misled them, as does all faith in the false.

Verse 11.—To him they had regard. The same word translated in verse 10, "gave heed," is here translated, "had regard." He had bewitched them, etc. More exactly, "they had been bewitched." This length of time had tended much to confirm their faith. He had managed to escape detection and exposure, and so questions and doubts were gradually silenced.

II. As Church-member.

Verse 12.—When they believed Philip. The persons mentioned in verse 10. The movement was quite general, evidently, though the language does not require us to suppose that all Simon's dupes became Christians. Preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and [concerning] the name of Jesus Christ. The true preacher shapes his message to his hearer's wants. Not unlikely, the burden of Simon's doctrine had been a new temporal kingdom of God about to be set up, of which Simon himself was to be the acknowledged head (verse 10). They were baptized. Were being baptized, proceeded to be baptized. Their baptism was a public, solemn, prescribed profession, or avowal of their faith (verse 37). This avowal, as was usual in apostolic times, followed the conversion at once, without needless delay. Men and women. In Christ "there is neither male nor female," (no infants).

Verse 13.—Then Simon himself believed also. "Himself also," as well as the people; and as the expression implies, after, not before their conversion from him to Christ. He, like the rest, professed belief, and went with the believers. Wondered, beholding, etc. The word translated "miracles," designates the works as the result of power, or omnipotence; that translated "signs" designates them as designed to carry a meaning, or testimony to those who saw them.

Verse 14.—The apostles which were at Jerusalem. It seems that for some unexplained cause the apostles were not

obliged to leave that city. They sent unto them Peter and John. Upon the apostles, who had and have no "successors" the church in a special sense was founded. To them were given authority, and the corresponding wisdom and power to regulate all matters of faith.

Verse 15.—When they were come down. And so, from personal inspection had satisfied themselves of the genuineness of this work of grace, Prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. That "they," the Samaritan Christians. The reception of the Holy Spirit was, in this case, to enable them to work miracles, not for their regeneration, as this has already been experienced and witnessed in their conversion.

Verse 16.—Not yet, etc. See on verse 15, "not yet" given to confer the power of working miracles. Baptized in [into] the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. They had taken Jesus to be Lord, and in token of this been baptized. They had become professing disciples, and so church members, and had no official gifts—constituting some of their number prophets, etc.

Verse 17.—And they received the Holy Ghost [Spirit]. The imposition of hands solemnly symbolized the separation of the person for his new office, and power, and work; and the impartation of the Spirit qualifying for the same.

III. As Office Seeker.

Verse 18.—When Simon saw, etc. The power of working miracles was imparted. Hence for the first time it occurred to him that it could be made over to him. Offered [brought to] them money. Which had been paid him for his miracles.

Verse 19.—Give me this power, etc. Characteristic; ambitious for nothing less than the highest gift. He saw in such power millions of gold.

IV. As Convict.

Verse 20.—Peter said. Shocked at this revelation of Simon's old nature and spirit. Thy money perish, etc. He marks the gulf, great and fixed, between such a man and a Christian, between such a spirit and Christianity. Of course it is not a wish on Peter's part that Simon may be lost, nor even a prediction that he will be, as verse 22 shows. That the gift, etc. Literally, to "to acquire by money the gift of God." A contemptible money purchase, contrasted with the divine gift.

Verse 21.—Part nor lot. See Deut. x. 9. Totally separate and alien from the salvation of God. For thy heart, etc. Pointing out the seat of the whole trouble, the source of his contemptible and shocking proposal. Covetousness, in the form of attempting to use purely for worldly ends the religion and grace of God.

Verse 22.—Repent, etc. Peter was not made sure by revelation, as in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, that there was no hope for Simon. The thought—of the purchase, as revealing and embodying the whole spiritual state of the man.

Verse 23.—Gall of bitterness. See Job xx. 14; Romans iii. 13. "The expression imports malignant, aggravated depravity." Bond of iniquity. Specially pertinent, as Simon's words showed that his old sin retained its power over him, and even in his new relations and professions—the power of an inward habit—the persistence of a depraved state, to be unbroken only by the mighty power of God's Spirit—the making one a "new creature!"

Verse 24.—Pray ye, etc. Terror, fear of results; not penitence and reverential fear—no evidence of conversion.

QUESTIONS.—What persecution followed the death of Stephen? Who was foremost in this cruelty? What became of the disciples? Which one of the seven went down to Samaria? What results followed his labors? Whose labors in Samaria preceded his?

Vs. 9. How did Simon deceive the Samaritans? He boasted greatly; how did the apostles speak of their works. Acts ii. 12.

Vs. 12. How did the believers profess their faith? Is baptism a matter of indifference to be attended to or neglected just as one likes? Matthew xxviii. 19; Acts 11 38.

Vs. 13. Did Simon's baptism regenerate him? Does baptism regenerate anybody? Of what is it a symbol? Romans vi. 4.

Verse 18. What gift better than outward gifts is now given? 1 Cor. xiii. 1, 2.

Vs. 19. What was Simon's real desire? Vs. 22. May a bad man be exhorted to pray?

Verse 24. Had Simon any penitence of a godly sort? 2 Cor. vii. 10. Will mere fear save us? 1 John iv. 18. 19.—Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, October 29th, 1876.—Philip and the Ethiopian.—Acts viii. 26-40.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

A Short Sermon.

BY ALICE GARY.

Children who read my lay,
This much I have to say:
Each day, and every day,
Do what is right,
Right things in great and small;
Then, though the sky should fall,
Sun, moon, and stars, and all,
You shall have light.

This further would I say:
Be you tempted as you may,
Each day, and every day,
Speak what is true,
True things in great and small,
Then though the sky should fall,
Sun, moon, and stars, and all,
Heaven would show through.

Figs, as you see and know,
Do not out of thistles grow;
And though the blossoms blow,
While on the tree,
Grapes never, never yet
On the limbs of thorns were set:
So, if you good would get,
Good you must be.

Life's journey through and through,
Speaking what is just and true,
Doing what is right to do
Unto one and all.
When you work, and when you play,
Each day and every day;
Then peace shall gild your way,
Though the sky should fall.

A Little Boy's Prayer.

A correspondent of Zion's Herald tells this story: "A two year old little fellow, who had been from home some weeks, was highly delighted when his father came for him, and that night no one but papa must undress the little fellow and put him to bed. When he had been nicely tucked in, and had repeated after his father the beautiful child's prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep, he quickly remarked, 'Pray more,' with the evident design of retaining the father so long a time as he might, in the sleeping-room. The father, for the first time recalled the Lord's prayer to his boy, who repeated it two or three words at a time after the father, until they came to the petition, 'Give us this day our daily bread;' when the little fellow gratified his appetite by praying, with much emphasis upon the last word, 'Give us this day our daily bread and pie.'"

Seven "Mind's."

- 1. Mind your tongue! Don't let it speak hasty, cruel, unkind, or wicked words. Mind!
- 2. Mind your eyes! Don't permit them to look on wicked books, pictures, or objects. Mind!
- 3. Mind your ears! Don't suffer them to listen to wicked speeches, songs, or words. Mind!
- 4. Mind your lips! Don't let tobacco foul them. Don't let strong drink pass them. Don't let the food of the glutton enter between them. Mind!
- 5. Mind your hands! Don't let them steal or fight, or write any evil words. Mind!
- 6. Mind your feet! Don't let them walk into the steps of the wicked. Mind!
- 7. Mind your heart! Don't let the love of sin dwell in it. Don't give it to Satan but ask Jesus to make it His throne. Mind!

Kindness to Animals.

Young friends, be kind to animals. It is very wicked and cruel to torture and tease them for your amusement. What may be a delight to your own cruel feelings may be death to them. It is very seldom that a boy who loves to treat any creatures unkindly, and delights to see them writhe under the injuries which he is inflicting, becomes a good man; and I have read of instances where murderers on the gallows have confessed, a few moments before they were launched into eternity, that their crimes commenced by pulling off the legs and wings, of flies, and by throwing stones at the beautiful birds. Think of this, young friends, and if you have ever indulged in cruelty, consider what it may in the end lead to, unless checked at once. The fly and the bird were created for some wise purpose by the Almighty, and he never intended that these creatures should be torn in pieces for your amusement.

The Hell Gate Explosion.

This mass of rock just under water at the entrance of New York harbor, must have been a terribly dangerous place to have received such an awful name. What a good thing that it was possible to remove it. After years of persevering skilful labor it has at length been shattered to pieces by an explosion of dynamite. When everything was ready for the explosion it was a simple thing to apply the electric spark. The following story of how it was at last done is from the New York Herald:

Mr. Striedinger stood near his batteries on the east end of the platform, on his left sat Mrs. Newton, in front was the improvised table on which the key was laid, on the west side of that stood the little girl, and between her and Mrs. Newton stood the General.

"Come, little Mary," said the General to the tiny, blue eyed little three-year old maiden as she stood upon the box with the nurse beside her, "play with this," at the same time placing her hand upon the key. The little girl smiled in her mother's face as she toyed with the silver knob.

"Come what are you going to do, Mary" said the General; "you have been talking about it for some time."

The General's eyes nervously watched the river. It was quite free from craft. He looked at his watch.

"Six minutes yet," said Captain Mercur.

"Oh, now," exclaimed the General: "what is the Pleasant Valley coming away down here for. I don't understand it," he added in a tone of vexation.

"They had strict orders. They will spoil it all."

The boat indicated appeared to be drifting down toward the mine. Her progress ceased in a minute, however, and the General said in a relieved tone, "O well, she is not too near, anyhow."

"There, the white flag is up on the scow," cried Captain Mercur. "Why not fire it now?"

"No," replied the General; "I gave the people notice that I would wait ten minutes after the gun fired to give the people time to get out of their houses, and I will stick to it, although I feel exactly like letting it go!"

"There, the white flag is up again," exclaimed some one.

All was breathless silence among the little group, and even the spectators, straining their necks over the fence above, seem to feel the awfulness of the occasion.

"O," said Mrs. Newton, "it seems just like waiting for an execution!"

Two men near the battery now closed the switch, and little Mary's hands are kept from the key, for the slightest touch on the delicate silver knob would now precipitate the climax.

A few months more of breathless waiting: Captain Mercur's watch declares the time arrived. Mr. Striedinger's fingers twitch nervously about the wires. Suddenly the white flag is seen moving from the scow. The General says, in a collected and affectionate tone:

"Come, little Mary, touch this key again."

The chubby white little hand of the child approaches the key. Mrs. Newton's eyes are fixed on the little girl with motherly pride, and the General seeing the direction of her look, cries:

"Come look out there toward the blast. You don't want to look here."

The lady's eyes follow the direction indicated, as do those of all within the structure. The child's hand rests innocently upon the key, a slight tremor shakes the earth, followed by a dull, rumbling sound, which seems to travel along the direction of the ledge and to come from an enormous subterranean depth. Ere the senses have fully perceived these, the water over the blast seems to boil for a period not exceeding half a second and then a column of water 320 feet wide and seventy-five feet high shoots up from the midst of it.

The top of this mass was gleaming white foam, towering up into pinnacles like inverted icicles, while near to the surface of the river the column is darker until near its base it is a dark yellow.

In the centre of the mass a monstrous stone weighing many tons whirls around like a spinning top. Half a second after this column rose thus a second one ascends in toward the shore. It evidently comes from the mouth of the

shaft, and it rolls in dense black clouds, like smoke. The blackness is the mud from the bottom of the heading. This column rolls over the shore 200 feet inland. Descending it strikes the top of the bombproof and washes off a couple of feet of the earth placed on its roof. In its passage it strikes the little one story office described and washes it five feet away, throwing it partially on its side. Strange to say, Quigley's plan of opening the windows was successful, for not a single pane of glass is broken!

The party gaze in silent awe on the mighty mass of water until it subsides in a low wave which traverses half the river. Turning toward the party the General says, jocularly:

"That's something like an explosion gentlemen."

Before the words have left his mouth a spontaneous cheer for the success of the work and of admiration for its director rises from the throats of the assembled thousands and is reechoed from the other side of the river and from the Astoria shore.

Returning Prosperity in Ireland.

No one who now revisits Ireland after an absence of some years can have any doubt that she has made considerable advance in material prosperity, says the London Spectator. Evidence of the fact is borne in upon him in the multiplicity of ways. The prosperity is not such as this country enjoys, but of its kind it is real and considerable. It has been attained through terrible sufferings that reflect discredit on our statesmanship and our intelligence, but now that the suffering is past it is some consolation that it has not been undergone altogether in vain. The great emigration which followed the famine has diminished competition for the land, has brought the population within the limits the wages fund can support, and in short has made the general condition tolerable.

If that were all, the prosperity would be unsubstantial indeed. In the middle of last century there was a famine as grievous as that of '47, and yet the beginning of the present century saw the population outgrowing the means of subsistence. If there were at present, then, no more than a reduction of numbers, we might well fear a repetition of the difficulties and sufferings of the period before the potato failure. But fortunately there is much more than a reduction of numbers, or rather, the reduction of numbers only makes room for the action of the favorable causes. Inefficient and defective as in many respects the national schools are, they still have been at work for forty years, not without producing good fruits.

Yet more powerful has been the influence of emigration. Thousands of people pass to and fro annually between Ireland and England, the United States and Australia. They bring to the knowledge of the stay-at-homes a new world, new states of society, new conditions altogether. All these things have dispelled the mists of insular prejudice and insular ignorance that hung over the land, and have swept with a fresh blaze the nooks and crannies of helpless apathy. Moreover, the vast multitudes that are settled beyond the Atlantic and in the South Pacific have made America and Australia sound like home to the Irishman. He is no longer resigned, therefore, to injustice or poverty. He knows that the world is wide. He stands upon his independence, and resolves to better himself if he thinks he is not treated well. Employers and landlords understand the feeling, and they do not presume as of old. Lastly, the Land Act has improved immeasurably the position of the far.

A MOTHER'S PRAYER.—A Christian mother had a sailor boy thousands of miles away from her. She awoke one night thinking about her absent boy. Something seemed to whisper to her, "Get up and pray for your son." She got up and prayed long and earnestly for him. Afterwards she found that he had been in great danger at that very hour.

He had been washed overboard in a storm, and was caught by the hair of the head, and snatched from a watery grave at the very time that his mother was praying for him.

A contented mind is a continual feast.