

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, December 9th, 1877.—Paul in Melita.—Acts xxviii. 1-10.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 1-6.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."—Rom. i. 14.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxviii. 1-10. Tuesday, vs. 3; 2 Thessalonians iii. 7-18. Wednesday, vs. 5; Mark xvi. 9-20. Thursday, vs. 6; Acts xiv. 11-19. Friday, vs. 6; Matthew xi. 7-19. Saturday, vs. 8; James v. 13-19. Sunday, Psalm ii.

ANALYSIS.—I. Recognizing the island. Vs. 1. II. Kindness of its inhabitants. Vs. 2. III. Change of opinion. Vs. 3-6. IV. Entertained by Publius. Vs. 7. V. Miracles. Vs. 8, 9. VI. Departure with benefits. Vs. 10.

QUESTIONS.—Of what other island was Malta a dependency? To what empire did both Sicily and Malta belong? What are the dimensions of Malta?

Vs. 1. Why had not these sailors recognized this island before?

Vs. 2. What did the Greeks, and afterward the Romans, call all nations but themselves? 1 Cor. xiv. 11. Why kindle a fire?

Vs. 3. What interesting incident is here related? What trait does Paul here exhibit? Paul was not idle? Chap. xviii. 3; xx. 34; 1 Cor. iv. 12; ix. 6-12. What creature leaps out of the fire?

Vs. 4. What suspicion do the natives now express?

Vs. 5. What does Paul do as a man having no fear?

Vs. 6. How do the natives now change their minds?

Vs. 7. Who was Publius? Who of the ship's company were entertained by him?

Vs. 8. How was this courtesy repaid? What was his father's disease? How was he healed?

Vs. 10. How long did Paul tarry at Melita? Why? When he departed, how was he laden?

THE APOSTLE AT MELITA.—The shipwrecked mariners are now on firm land, after a dangerous, but most interesting voyage. It is in cold weather about the first of November. At that time Melita was a thinly-peopled island. Its population has greatly increased in modern times. It was, at the time of our study, a dependency of Sicily, belonging to Rome. Its language was Carthaginian, or Phoenician. The French and English, at the close of the last century, had an exciting struggle relating to its ownership. The island is seventeen miles only in length, nine miles in greatest breadth, and sixty miles in circumference. It is curious that in this wild island of Melita the apostle, having been looked upon as an atrocious criminal because a viper had fastened upon his hand, when he shook the reptile off without having received any injury, was admired as a god. In Melita, as in Lystra, the belief in gods under the human form had not yet given place to the incredulous spirit of the age. All through the winter months Paul and his companions were detained in Malta by the suspension of navigation. The date when navigation was resumed was probably about the middle of February.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 1.—They knew, etc. Or, rather, ascertained. Either from the inhabitants, or by observation. See xxvii. 39. Another reading of high authority is, "We discovered." Melita. Now Malta. Far to the north, in the Adriatic, is an island then bearing the same name, but now called Melida. Some, against all probabilities, have regarded this as the place of the shipwreck. "Traditional evidence, and Malta's position" on the line of travel from Alexandria to Rome (vs. 11); and its answer to the demands of the account of the subsequent course makes it certain that Malta is the island.

Verse 2.—The barbarous people. "So called, with reference to their language, which was not that either of the Greeks or the Romans. Rom. i. 14; 1 Cor. xiv. 11. The Maltese, since the Saracen eruption, speak an Arabic dialect. The Roman officials are afterwards met. No little kindness. Those wrecked on the Mediterranean coasts had been wont to receive plunder, rather than charity.

Verse 3.—When Paul had, etc. Dry sticks. Not green, wood, to make a quick fire. The wrecked visitors helped themselves, not leaving both the labor

and the kindness wholly to the islanders. There came a viper, etc. It "had evidently been taken up by Paul among the sticks." It "was probably in a torpid state, and was suddenly restored to activity by the heat."

Verse 4.—Saw the venomous beast, etc. "Venomous" is in italics, and should be omitted. Of course it was venomous, but Luke has not used the word. The creature "hung" down its full length, having "fastened" itself upon the hand with its fangs, when it made its quick and horrid leap. Said among themselves, while it was hanging, the saying must have been rather in thought. They had time to say it while they "looked." Vs. 6. Surely this man is a murderer, etc. They were of course aware that he was a prisoner, and hence the more readily took this view. The sense of sin and punishment speaks in these words, and it is a universal sense. Sometimes God's righteous judgment is visited upon men here, meting out signal suffering to signal guilt. This was common in the Hebrew theocracy, and we may compare 1 Cor. xi. 30; 1 Tim. v. 24, 25, etc. The error of the islanders' argument appears in the "no doubt." Instead of "vengeance suffereth," read, justice suffered. Justice regarded as a person, whose determination had been made to cause Paul's death.

Verse 5.—And he shook off the beast, etc. "He felt no harm," because he suffered none, and he suffered none, not because he was not really bitten, nor because the serpent's bite was not deadly, as was thought; but because of miraculous preservation, given according to the promise in Mark xvi. 18, in order to attest Paul as God's servant, and prepare the way for his ministry during the coming winter months. Vs. 11.

Verse 6.—Howbeit they looked, etc. Expecting him to fall down dead suddenly. The effect of such a bite was sometimes sudden death, as in the case of Cleopatra, and sometimes a lingering, painful death. After they had looked, etc. xiv. 11, 19. It is said that "Hercules was worshipped in this island, and the power of curing the bite of serpents was attributed to him.

Verse 7.—In the same quarters, etc. In that neighborhood, not far away. The Roman officer in actual command or some other dignitary. There are monuments preserved, bearing inscriptions as to the island, and containing this very unusual title; thus verifying this account. Who were lodged by the wealthy and generous Publius, is not stated. One conjecture is, only "Luke, Paul, Aristarchus, and the noble-hearted Julius."

Verses 8, 9.—And it came to pass, etc. Literally, fever and dysentery.

Verse 10.—Who also, etc. Instead of "also," read both. These "honors" were courteous attentions. The gifts were given at the departure, and, doubtless, at Paul's demand, were confined to mere necessities. Matt. x. 8.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, December 16th, 1877.—Paul at Rome.—Acts xxviii. 16-31.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ."—Romans i. 15, 16.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

They found that they were on the island of Melita, or, as we call it, Malta. The people who lived there were called barbarians—not that they were wild or cruel, but because they were neither Greeks nor Romans. They proved very kind. They kindled a great fire, for it was cold and rainy; and the clothes of those who were saved from the wreck were wet through. Paul, who was always ready to help, gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire. A viper—a poisonous serpent, that had been stiff with the cold—no sooner felt the heat, than it was roused and clung to Paul's hand. The barbarians expected his body to swell, and him to fall suddenly down dead; and they said, "This man must be a murderer; and though he has escaped the sea, the gods will not suffer him to live." But, while they were watching him, Paul quietly shook off the serpent into the fire, and was unhurt. When they saw that, they quickly changed their minds, and, like the people of Lystra, said that he was a

god. You may be sure that Paul would not let them think that, but told them of the one God, who made all things. Publius, the governor of Malta, not only treated all of them kindly, but took Paul and his friends into his own house.

Paul had an opportunity to pay him for his kindness; for the father of Publius was sick with fever and dysentery, and Paul cured him by laying on his hands and praying. This was soon known; and many others who were sick came and were cured. During their stay of three months at Malta, great honors were paid them; and when they left, they were loaded with presents.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest. DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS. CHAP. XLIX.—THE NEW ORDER OF THINGS.

It took Matthew a considerable time to settle down to his quiet country life: the silence, broken only by the singing of birds, and the lowing of the cattle in the neighbouring fields, was at first painfully oppressive to him. Dorothy had been used to it nearly all her life, and Hugh loved it: the stir of the East-end had always been distasteful to him; but to Matthew, unaccustomed to country life, that stir seemed necessary to his existence. The only place in the village where he could enjoy a little noise was the Railway Station, and thither he repaired every morning and evening for about an hour, to watch the departure and return of business men to and from London, whose homes were in the village.

Hugh did not think that Matthew felt the change so painfully; still he suspected that he felt it to a degree, and he read to him from books, and from a London daily paper which Matthew brought home with him from the station every morning; he would have him go out with himself every fair day, through lanes and woods in search of subjects for his pencil, so that in the course of three or four months Hugh's efforts were rewarded by a confession from Matthew, that he did not think he would like now to return to the old order of things. "I think I've took to the place now, about as well as my old Tom," said Matthew one sunny July day, as he sat in his arm-chair, with his black cat curled up asleep on the warm garden path. "And this seems a more suitable sort o' life for a old chap like me, as is nearly got to the end o' my journey; that the hagglin' and werret and noise of a bizzness life, don't it, now?"

"Yes, sir," answered Hugh, looking very pleased. "It does me good to see you free from work and worry, after the long and busy life you've led; and I am so glad, you like the country. It likes you, I can see, for you have quite a colour in your face now, that has been so pale the last two or three years, and you look as if ten years may be added to your life to come and live here."

"Well, you couldn't look better than ye do: you're a pictur' of health and strength," said Matthew, looking with affectionate admiration at the well-developed, bright-faced youth, radiant with health and contentment. "The exercise as you've took since we come here has done ye a power o' good, Hugh,—the cricket, and the football, and swimmin', and boatin', on our bit of a stream,—it's all put fresh life into ye, and it's ye ought to ha' bin' doin' long afore this, only we hadn't no chance, stowed up in a close London place."

"Oh, better late than never," replied Hugh, pleasantly. "I like all these exercises so much that it's easy to me to get on at them. Did I tell you that Mr. Smithson came along the bank the other morning when I was bathing, and challenged me to dive for a pocket-comb: it was the only thing he had about him that he didn't mind wetting?"

"And did ye hook it up?" asked Matthew, with great interest.

"Yes, sir, I swam out to the deepest part, and told him to throw it in there, and down I went like an otter, and threw it out at his feet."

"Bravo! Hoopay!" exclaimed Matthew, laughing excitedly. "And what did pa'son say to that?"

"He said he couldn't have done it more neatly himself,—though perhaps that was a little stretch to please me: I know he's splendid in the water."

"No, pa'son don't stretch to please nobody," said Matthew, vigorously. "I think well of him, I do, and I knows that what praise he gives he means. It's pleasant to see how he've took to we humble folks, and he's a born gentleman they tells me, and a good un, too, as haven't jest crep' into the church to make a livin', or to stick hisself up, as some does. But he feels the vally of souls as much as ever Josiah Hartlebury does, what works for nothin' but the love of God and his fellow-critters."

Jest see the tears shine in pa'son's eyes, at the back of 'em like, when he talks of Tom Reany and his wife, both on 'em hopeless characters, with a family of little uns growin' up around 'em. Why, I believe he'd go as fur as layin' down his life if he could bring them worthless sinners to lead a proper life, and love the Lord."

"He is a truly earnest, good man," said Hugh, heartily, "and everybody likes him. Do you notice how he has won grandmother's heart, sir?"

"Ay, ay, lad, but somebody won it afore him, else I guess pa'son wouldn't ha' had much chance with her,—and that somebody was you. Eh! how the Lord do work to be sure; it's uncommon interestin' to watch His ways. It seems to me as He mostly draws we unwillin' sinners to Him right through the heart of some fellow-critter,—anyways that's how he drew me, and now it seems as Mrs. Dorothy's goin' the same road: she've grad'ally growed more like a Christian 'oman ought to be since you've took her under your wing, my lad."

"She has learnt many a lesson of kindness and patience, and resignation from you, sir," responded Hugh, warmly. "And this has prepared her for attending to our minister's teaching. Don't you often wish, when listening to his earnest words to such people as the Reaneys, that he could see his way clear to be a total abstainer?"

"That's jest what I do, lad," said Matthew. "But we'll get him over by'n-by, I'm hopin'. Folks about here tells me that he've bin a more feelin', soft-hearted sort o' chap since he were married about twelve months ago; and if he've got a wife what's doin' him good in that blessed fashion, why, we may expect as he won't be behind in helpin' poor drunkards by showin' 'em the best and safest way of actin'."

"This accounts for Alice Reany's fits of sadness, about which Lisa used to tell us," said Hugh. "How can she be happy, poor girl, when she thinks of what her parents are, and of her wretched home! What a place it must be to bring up these young children in!"

"Ay, bad enough, surely," answered Matthew, with deep feeling. "And they tell me that Reany and his wife didn't used to drink afore they had that place; it's another case, ye see, of the bitter gettin' bit, and that same 'I've often seen with these old eyes. It's not often as a man keeps a public without either takin' to the drink hisself, or else seein' one of his family go to the bad through it."

"Mr. Smithson was talking to me the other evening, when I was helping him at his night-school, about the labouring lads: it so disheartened him, he said, to see them, when school was over, though he had been talking to them so earnestly, drift away straight to the public-house, where all the good they had got at school was at once undone. He is thinking, he says, of organizing a Temperance society for them, and he wished me to be president; but I suggested that he should wait a little until he could see his way clear to be president himself."

"And what did he say to that?" asked Matthew.

"He only smiled in his kind way, and said he did not know whether his doctor would allow him to be an abstainer. He had had a severe illness two or three years ago, and the doctor had ordered him to take regularly the small quantity which he has kept to ever since."

"Doctors,—fiddlesticks!" exclaimed Matthew scornfully. "What do they know about it? Don't they do more mischief than ever they do good, orderin' these things as brings folks clean to ruin? Better let 'em die than make drunkards of 'em; but ne'er a one have ever died yet, and never will, for the want o' the poison as men calls brandy, and wine, and such things,—though many a thousand have died

through takin' 'em. If the poor things are befooled by doctors in these matters, they must take the consequence; but Christian folks, it seems to me, and specially pa'sons, ought to have more faith in God than in the doctors; and in their lovin' care for their fellow-critters, they ought never let a doctor come between them and sech a Bible-text' as this, "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is made weak."

"Well, it seems to me, sir," answered Hugh, "that our Mr. Smithson is so unselfish and sound-hearted, that there will be no difficulty in winning him over if we set ourselves earnestly to the task. We have only to discuss this question, and bring home to him his responsibility in connection with the drunkards of his parish, and I believe we shall have him. He confessed to me that he had never given much consideration to the subject. But here are drunkards all around him, his own parishioners, and he must consider them. It is quite astonishing to see how many there are in a small, quiet place like this, that must seem to strangers who pass through, a Paradise of beauty and order."

"But this worm's at the root of many a fair roof-tree throughout the country," said Matthew. "But I shall talk it over with pa'son next time he comes in. We've mostly talked about other things when he've come,—of you specially, my lad: he's uncommon interested about you; but when he comes again, Temperance shall come to the fore."

"That reminds me that he is coming to see my latest designs before I send them off, so I'd better be quick and get them finished," said Hugh; and he went in and sat down to work straightway, leaving Matthew basking in the sunshine with his cat.

In the afternoon of the same day the Rev. Hubert Smithson, vicar of the parish, called to have a chat with Matthew. This gentleman, when visiting his people, did not confine himself to remarks about their temporal concerns, the weather, current events, and the gossip of the parish. He always found an opportunity to say something in a winning, pleasant manner to lift their hearts nearer to the Master whom he delighted to serve and honour, to speak words of heavenly comfort and hope to those in trouble, and to make them feel the better for his visit. A sense of hungry disappointment never disturbed his people after his intercourse with them. Without obtrusiveness, with a gentle, perfectly natural manner that was grateful even to those who cared nothing for religion, he made them all feel that, in visiting them, he was not performing an irksome duty, in a cold, unhearty way; but that he was indeed about his Heavenly Father's business. The consequence was, that there was not a house in the whole village where he was not truly welcome. Many of the villagers were attendants at the little Primitive Methodist chapel, in which Dora and her boy had once been refreshed; but to these people, whose pulpit was supplied chiefly by local preachers, there was but one 'pa'son' in the village, called affectionately 'our pa'son' by them as well as by the church-goers, and by people who went to neither church nor chapel.

Mr. Smithson was aware that Matthew had dissenting proclivities, and that he never missed attending the little chapel when Josiah Hartlebury came to preach; but that made no difference in his hearty regard for the old man. "If all my parishioners attended church as frequently as you do, Mr. Pedder, I should not feel so disheartened in my work as I am sometimes tempted to be," he would say; "but if they attended as regularly as Mrs. Sharpe, I should be the happiest vicar in the kingdom!"

Dorothy never, on any occasion, went to chapel. She had sat in the same pew, in the little, grey old church, from the time of her girlhood until she went away to London. During her sojourn there her old minister had died, and this new vicar, Mr. Smithson, reigned in his stead; and Dorothy was now back again in her old pew, worshipping and learning in a devout and hungry spirit, very different altogether from the cold indifference, the dead formality of past years.

(To be continued.)

Give reverence to the rare man who love the truth better than they love themselves.