

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, July 29th, 1877.—The Yoke Broken.—Acts xv. 22-31.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 25-31.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.”—Gal. v. 1.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xv. 1-31. Tuesday, Acts x. Wednesday, Acts xi. Thursday, Galatians ii. Friday, vs. 27; Leviticus xvii. 10-16. Saturday, vs. 29; Romans xiv. Sunday, 1 Corinthians xiii.

ANALYSIS.—I. A delegation sent to Antioch. Vs. 22. II. With “letters.” Vs. 23. III. Contents of letters. Vs. 23-29. IV. Rejoicing in Antioch. Vs. 30, 31.

QUESTIONS.—What was the great question the Apostolic Church was called to answer at this period? Why had the results of Paul’s first missionary tour aggravated the controversy? How did the Jews look upon their ceremonial law? What did they think the universal spread of the gospel would do with Judaism? How did the Judaizing party of Judah try to check the spread of the gospel in Antioch? To what council did the church in Antioch submit itself for a settlement of the difficulty? Who spoke first in the council at Jerusalem? Who followed Peter? What did they rehearse? Who followed these apostles? What harmony does James show between God’s word and God’s providences in that age? In view of these ancient prophecies to what conclusion does he come? See vs. 19. While the Gentiles were not to be troubled with Jewish burdens against what heathenish practices were they to guard? Vs. 20. What, then, had each party to give up?

Vs. 22. What three classes composed this assembly? Do we see any pre-eminence in it? What do they decide to do? Why are two men besides Paul and Barnabas sent? Do we hear of either one of these two messengers again? Acts xvi. 25.

Vs. 23. What was the object of the council in sending letters to Antioch?

Vs. 24. What responsibility does the church in Jerusalem disclaim?

Vs. 25. By what divine aid was a decision of the question at issue reached? What lesson should this teach churches when in trial? What was the decision reached? What prohibitions were enjoined upon the Gentile Christians? Was not this conceding to the Jews? What greater concessions were expected from the Jews? Should we not all avoid giving offence to God’s people by self-indulgence in things indifferent? To what may this be applied in this age? Have we Scriptures for this? Rom. xiv. 15.

Vs. 30, 31. When this decision reached Antioch, how did it affect the church? Is there not occasion for rejoicing when peace succeeds to discord?

How to form a united church on earth, composed of Gentile and Jewish Christians, without enforcing or abrogating the whole Mosaic law, was one of the greatest questions the apostolic church had to answer. The Jew had a covenant of circumcision that sanctioned and enforced national isolation. How could he entertain the idea of a cordial, social and religious union with the uncircumcised? A feeling of discontent became more and more evident as new Gentile converts were admitted into the church. The return of Paul and Barnabas from their first missionary journey with reports of the door of faith opened to the Gentiles, were the signal for a storm of indignation among the Jewish Christians. They looked upon the whole thing as an organized movement to absorb and destroy Judaism. It was a time for battle; and the battle came. Paul and Barnabas are at Antioch, when lo! some Judaizers, or false brethren, as Paul calls them, are threatening the liberty of Gentile Christians, requiring them to submit to Mosaic ordinances in order to enjoy the blessings of the gospel. After much controversy at Antioch, Paul and Barnabas are sent to obtain the decision of the apostles and elders at Jerusalem. The council there is convened. Peter rehearses his primary work as an apostle in giving the gospel to the Gentiles himself, by his own mouth, and claims that the question was settled by divine authority. Then Paul and Barnabas rehearse their work. Finally, James, the Lord’s brother (Gal. i. 19), the president of the council, addresses it, and shows the agreement of Peter’s views with ancient prophecy. Amos. ix. 11, 12. “His argument is this: when God predicted that the Gentiles should hear his

name, he made no mention of their circumcision, and this agrees with the facts reported to us.”—Anno. Bible. James now proposes that no further burden should be laid upon the Gentiles, “except these, which must of necessity be borne—that they abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. To this the whole church at Jerusalem agreed. “The wall of partition was broken down.” “The yoke of bondage,” which false teachers would have reimposed on the neck of believers, was broken for ever, and over all there fell “the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free.” Once for all it was, in substance, asserted that in the Christian church there is “neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bond, nor free, but that Christ is all and in all.” Col. iii. 11.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 22.—Then. After all the speeches made in the council. (vs. 6-21), and especially that of James with its recommendation of a policy. Vs. 19-21. To the apostles, and their office was only temporary for the authoritative founding of the church and revelation of its doctrine. The elders were officers of a permanent order. “The church” as a whole united in the council and took part in giving decision—quite “congregational.” To send chosen men. Or rather, having chosen men to send them. This delegation, by their presence and fuller explanations of matters in dispute would have great influence in Antioch, in opposition to the self-constituted Judaizing delegation.

Verse 23.—Wrote letters by them. Sent by them the letter written and here given. Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. Sent to other churches than that at Antioch because the same questions and doctrines were troubling them.

Verse 24.—Forasmuch as we have heard, etc. The letter gives the ground of action. Have troubled you. Very serious disturbance of mind was caused. Words. But not truth. Subverting your souls. Intending so to do, and, in some cases, partially or wholly succeeding. The nature of the doctrine, if accepted, was to subvert utterly. Gal. v. 1-6; Heb. vi. 4-8. Be circumcised and keep the law. The Judaizers conceded that the Gentiles might be saved by Christ, but only by first becoming proselytes. No such commandment. Omit “such.”

Verse 25.—Being assembled with one accord. Or rather “having become [come to be] of one mind. Having by consultation and under the Spirit’s guidance come to the same conclusion, unanimously. That the decision was reached only after struggle appears in vs. 6, 7. Chosen men. As in vs. 22, “having chosen men to send them.” With our beloved, etc. Mark here the term of confidence and love, intended to offset that contempt and distrust into which the Judaizers had tried to bring Paul and Barnabas.

Verse 26.—Hazarded their lives, etc. Referring specially to the missionary tour of which we have been studying, and which had just been publicly described. Vs. 12.

Verse 27.—Shall tell you the same things by mouth. Going more fully into the matter, answering questions and objections.

Verse 28.—To the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and to us. To us as guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit, which is here as usually represented as a person. No greater burden. The ceremonial law of the Jews was a burden and a yoke. These necessary things. Mentioned in vs. 29, as previously by James in vs. 10. They were “necessary” as those which must be avoided in order to secure harmony.

Verse 29.—That ye abstain, etc. This was virtually a command (vs. 28), because the Holy Spirit had guided to the decision. See 1 Cor. x. 25, and the question of conscience there discussed as springing from this very decree. To partake of such food was regarded as an act of worship to the idol, as eating the Lord’s Supper is Christ’s worship. Blood. Of any animals, whether offered in sacrifice or otherwise. To Jews that was sacrilege according to the law, and for the reasons given in Lev. xvii. 13, 14. Things strangled. And hence containing the blood. Fornication. This was scarcely regarded as a sin by the heathen. It was not contrary to any law they had,

and was deemed as a matter of indifference, and in many cases laudable. Ye shall do well. Such concession to prejudices for the peace of the church it is your duty to make, but the law of the Jews, as a whole, is not imposed upon you.

Verses 30, 31.—So was it regarded at Antioch. The breach was healed, and peace inaugurated. —Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, Aug. 5th, 1877.—Paul sent to Macedonia.—Acts xvi. 1-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord.”—2 Cor. ii. 12.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

The apostles and elders and the church in Jerusalem held a meeting, to consider what was best to teach the Gentiles about the Law of Moses. They wrote this letter, and sent Judas and Silas back with Paul and Barnabas, who had come to Jerusalem to talk the matter over:

The apostles and the elders and the brethren to the Gentile brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting:

As we have heard that some men, have troubled you with words that unsettled your minds, by telling you that you must keep the whole law of Moses, though we gave no orders to teach these things, it seemed good to choose some from amongst ourselves, and send to you, with our beloved Barnabas and Saul, men that have put their lives in danger for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. So we send Judas and Silas, who will tell you in words the same as we tell you by letter. For the Holy Ghost has shown us that we should lay on you no other burdens than these things which are necessary—that you should keep from meat offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from all impurity; from which if you keep yourselves, ye shall do well. FAREWELL.

When they came to Antioch, the church was called together to hear the letter read.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.

DORA’S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XXIX.—PITY AND PLUCK.

One of the chief things that proclaimed to Matthew Pedder and Hugh the arrival of spring was the frequent calls paid by low, evil-looking fellows proffering young birds for sale.

Matthew generally dismissed these troublesome customers with more promptitude than civility; and, as they vanished from the shop muttering curses upon things in general, and Matthew in particular, or whining over their ill-luck, Hugh many a time wondered what would become of the helpless fledglings, torn from their woodland nests and the tender care of the parent-birds, and now at the mercy of such heartless ruffians as those who wanted to make a little money by them.

The boy’s feeling heart many a time ached for the little sufferers, and he wished that Matthew would not deal in live stock; although, since he had become an inmate of Matthew’s house, he had seen nothing to shock him in the daily treatment of the birds. Indeed, Matthew had been particularly mindful of them, and bestowed upon them far more kindness than he had been wont to do. Still the narrow, close cages had not been disposed of, and the new victims, who, from time to time, were consigned to them, beat themselves about just as madly as their hapless predecessors had done; and, look after them as kindly and carefully as he would, there was a large amount of suffering endured every day amongst Matthew’s birds.

One morning a wretched, hungry-looking man came into the shop with the usual plea of young birds to sell. He wore a long, dilapidated coat with a large pocket at the side, and from this he drew out an old woollen stocking, and, in a miserable tone, glibly enumerated the different specimens he had to dispose of, and pleaded with an earnestness and a pathos that might have

moved a more obdurate heart than Matthew’s, that he would become a buyer of his stock.

Matthew stood out against his entreaties for some time, declaring that he did not want them, that he had no place to put them in. “Don’t ye see, man, that my place is choke full at this present?” he said. “And I’ve never yet brought myself to stive ‘em up under the counter, as some of ‘em do in this street what’s in business in the bird line, or stock my kitchen from floor to ceiling with ‘em, or my bedroom, which same is also done in these parts. But, as you says, there’s a rare un or two amongst yer rubbish, and you axes a reasonable price for ‘em, so, in hopes as spring customers ‘ll soon take ‘em off my hands, I don’t mind havin’ ‘em this time; but, please take partic’lar notice as you don’t show yer cheery phiz in here again on the same business.”

While Matthew was thus speaking to the doleful-faced man, he was fumbling amongst empty boxes and cages under the counter for something to put the birds in; and, after some minutes’ rummaging, he brought to view a rusty, dusty old cage, about a foot square, and said, rather impatiently, “There; shoot the small fry into there.”

The man eagerly unrolled the end of the stocking, which was folded over, and put it in at the cage-door; then holding it up by the toe, he ‘shot’ the small living mass pell-mell into their new quarters, where, with many weak plaintive chirps and flutterings, they tried to adjust themselves to the new condition of things. But there were two or three who could do nothing but lie helplessly, just where they were tumbled in: these chirped feebly, and looked up through the bars of their new prison as if to enquire what new miseries were in store for them.

“I guess it ain’t sech a profitable bag o’ game, after all,” observed Matthew; “ye see ye ha’n’t got much sense to transport ‘em in that fashion; there’s two or three of them with their legs broke, and what’s a busy man like me to do with ‘em ‘cept wring their necks? There, take yer money, and wish me a very good mornin’, and if you’ll take my advice, you’ll jest go off to stone-breakin’ or some sech work, instead o’ ketchin’ birds for the market.”

Hugh had been a sorrowful spectator of this transaction; and as soon as the man had left the shop, he said, as he peered at the suffering birds in the cage, “Oh, Mr. Pedder! I think you could set their broken legs if you’d only take the trouble. You’ve only just got to make splints, and bind them on carefully, you know; and when they get all right, they’d sell, wouldn’t they?”

Matthew looked at them for a minute with a business eye, and then said, “Well, there’s one of ‘em as might be worth the trouble; but the other two ain’t o’ much account; I don’t think I shall bother with them.”

Hugh looked at them in silent pity, and his eyes grew dim with tears. “Please, sir,” he said, at length, with a little quiver in his voice, “might I try to set them? I once saw a woman set a bird’s broken leg, and I think I could manage if you’d please to let me try.”

Matthew looked at him astonished, and exclaimed almost scornfully, “Hoity-toity! You a boy, and goin’ to blubber about paltry birds, eh?”

Hugh looked up through his tears, and said, “I can’t help feeling sorry for them, sir, and I ain’t ashamed of it.”

He turned away as he spoke, and walked slowly round to the shop-door, that Matthew might not be annoyed by the sight of his emotion. With a feeling of disappointment, and something almost approaching to contempt, Matthew looked after him; but these found expression in nothing stronger than, “I hope the boy ain’t goin’ to turn out a milk-sop,” which Matthew uttered to himself.

As soon as Hugh reached the open door and looked out, he exclaimed, “I’ll be back in a minute, sir!” and darted off down the street without his cap.

“I wonder what’s up now?” muttered Matthew, rather mystified. And he went rather hurriedly to the door, and was just in time to see Hugh snatch a broom from a boy much bigger than himself, and give it to a little girl who stood by. They were not near enough for Matthew to hear what was going on; but he saw the big boy making an attack

upon the girl again, and then Hugh pushing himself between them, and threatening the big boy with angry gestures. Then blows were struck; and the girl, contrary to all rules of warfare, went behind the big boy, and belaboured him with the broom. In a few moments, from different points of the compass, eager small fry were rushing, and a general melee seemed to be threatening; for as soon as the youngsters got excited enough, they would be indiscriminately hitting out right and left without any reason, just for the love of the thing. Matthew leisurely stalked off down the street in his red-flannel shirt-sleeves, and with his thumbs hooked in the strings of his apron. His bearing betokened utter indifference; but his eye was fixed on the combatants with almost anxious interest. He saw Hugh defending himself and the little girl with boldest courage against heavy odds; for now the big boy was assisted by one or two of those who had rushed up as spectators. Still Matthew did not quicken his steps or alter his mein; but when he arrived opposite to the combatants, he stood at the edge of the pavement, and shouted, “Hist!” in a voice that drowned all their clamour, and arrested them at once.

“Hugh, come here! that will do!” he shouted, like an officer giving the word of command; and while Hugh crossed over to him with a crimson face and a bleeding nose, looking very much ashamed of himself, the others stood silent and transfixed until Matthew betook himself homeward, with slow, majestic steps, followed by Hugh and Lisa.

“So you must needs try yer fists like any other Briton,” observed Matthew, rather severely, but with the greatest inward satisfaction.

“Please, sir, I couldn’t help it, replied Hugh, apologetically. “That big fellow was teasing Lisa, and knocking her about, and I was obliged to stand up for her.”

Matthew did not reply audibly; but he was saying to himself, “I guess the little chap ain’t a milk-sop after all!” Hugh was half afraid that he was angry with him for being a party in a street scuffle, which, in Hugh’s eyes, was a most disreputable affair; and he added, “I couldn’t help it this time, sir; but I hope it won’t happen again.”

“Oh, you might ha’ done many a worse thing than that, little chap,” said Matthew, in a tone that assured Hugh that he was not out of favour.

When they reached the shop Matthew said to Lisa, “Come in a minute or two till this ill-wind have blowed over; if those fellows follow you up maybe they’ll attack ye again!”

Lisa entered reluctantly and stood just within the door, looking out into the street. Hugh went away to the back-kitchen to wash his face, and Matthew returned to his new birds.

When Hugh came back into the shop Matthew said, “I guess all three o’ these birds can be doctored, Hugh; and, if they gets over their trouble, Lisa may have one of ‘em. See here, little lass, should ye like a bird o’ yer own to coddle and pet?”

Lisa turned and looked wistfully at the birds. “Yes, sir,” she said, “I should like one very much if I’d got a proper place to keep it in.”

“Oh, I can rummage ye up a cage as ‘ll fit it, I dessey,” replied Matthew.

“But, please sir, I don’t mean that,” said Lisa. “I couldn’t take one o’ them dear things to live in sech a place as I lives in: it ain’t proper light and airy, and it ‘ud likely pine away and die. I gets out every day, so it don’t matter so much to me; but the bird ‘ud be alwys there; and so I’ll say No, thank-very-much, sir.” And Lisa turned and looked out at the door again.

“Very well, Lisa, jest as you thinks best,” said Matthew, purposely refraining from making any remarks about her wretched home, being less willing now to cast reflections upon her father. “We must see how we can manage to do with ‘em ourselves, eh, little chap?”

“And, with a feeling of relief, Hugh answered readily, “Oh, yes, we shall manage them, sir.”

(To be continued.)

It is stated that Mr. Moody’s sermons have been translated into the Spanish, Swedish and Armenian languages. A Swede is reading them to his countrymen in Mr. Moody’s Church in Chicago. An Armenian edition has been published in Constantinople.