

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, November 18th, 1877.—Almost Persuaded.—Acts xxvi. 21-29.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 24-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian."—Acts xxvi. 28.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxvi. 21-32. Tuesday, vs. 22; Luke xxiv. 13-53. Wednesday, vs. 25; James i. 16-27. Thursday, vs. 27; Matthew ii. 16-23. Friday, vs. 27; Luke xxiii. 6-25. Saturday, vs. 27; Acts xii. Sunday, vs. 28; Luke xiii. 22-35.

ANALYSIS.—I. Murderous Jewish designs. Vs. 21. II. Paul's continuous fidelity. Vs. 22, 23. III. Accused of madness. Vs. 24. IV. Paul not mad but sober. Vss. 25-27. V. Agrippa disposed to jest. Vss. 28, 29.

QUESTIONS.—Who was Herod the Great, and of what cruelties was he guilty? Who was the Herod that beheaded John the Baptist and that examined Jesus by Pilate's request? Who was the Herod that put to death James and imprisoned Peter? What was his end? Who was the Herod now on a visit to Festus?

Vs. 21. What were some of Paul's offences in the eyes of the Jews? Where had he violated the Jewish law? Where, the Jewish temple? Where, the laws of Rome?

Vs. 22. How is Paul's safety up to this time to be accounted for? Does "small and great" refer to age or to rank?

Vs. 24. How did Festus interrupt Paul? Was Festus serious in making this charge?

Vs. 25. Does Paul take offence at the charge of Festus? How does he show his self-possession?

Vs. 26. How does he show great courtesy? To whose conscience does he appeal?

Vs. 28. What does Agrippa now say? Is he serious?

Vs. 29. What is Paul's earnest wish? What is meant by bonds? What is Agrippa's decision? Vss. 30-32.

THE HERODIAN FAMILY.—It is well to know who the Herod Agrippa II we are studying about in this lesson was. This dynasty was founded by a descendant of Esau. The Herods were Idumeans in ancestry; but though aliens in race, they had been brought over to John Hyrcanus (b. c. 130). The general policy of the Herodian family was to found a great and independent kingdom, in which the power of Judaism should subservise to the consolidation of a state. It sought the protection of Rome, but aimed at independent empire in the East. The members of the Herodian family who are mentioned in the Gospels and in the Acts are: I. Herod the Great, son of Antipater, procurator of Judea Julius Caesar (b. c. 47). His reign was marked by terrible bloodshed in his own family. He caused the slaughter of the infants of Bethlehem. Matt. ii. 16-18. II. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great. He beheaded John the Baptist. Matt. xiv. 4, etc. To him, when celebrating the passover at Jerusalem, Pilate sent Jesus for examination. Luke xxiii. 6, etc. He was capricious, despotic, sensual, superstitious. III. Archelaus, like Antipas, a son of Herod the Great. The kingdom designed for Antipas was left to him. Hence, Joseph's retreat from Egypt to Galilee. Matt. ii. 22. IV. Herod Agrippa I, a grandson of Herod the Great. He was brought up at Rome. He put to death James, and imprisoned Peter. Acts xii. 1, etc. In A. D. 44, after being saluted as a god, he was carried from the theatre in Caesarea to his palace, and died, after five days of suffering, in great agony. V. Herod Agrippa II, a son of Herod Agrippa I. About A. D. 50 the emperor Claudius gave him the kingdom of Chalcis in Northern Palestine. He built costly buildings at Beirut and Jerusalem. His relation to Bernice, his sister, was the cause of grave suspicion. After the fall of Jerusalem he retired with Bernice to Rome, where he died in the third year of Trajan (A. D. 100), being the last prince of the house of Herod. This was the man who was permitted to hear the impassioned words of the apostle, and who was cold enough in temper to take part afterward in the destruction of his nation.

EXPOSITION.—Our present lesson contains the close of Paul's plea; the exclamation of Festus; the reply of Paul; the comment of Agrippa; Paul's rejoinder.

I. Paul to the Assembly. Verses 22, 23.—Paul brings out with designed contrast what the Jews had done and attempted for his destruction; what God had done, and was doing for his preservation; and in consequence what he himself had continued to do, and was at that very instant doing in God's service.

The "causes" of both the persecution and the preservation, were the facts of vss. 19, 20; namely, his obedience to God, in becoming (1) a disciple of Christ, (2) a preacher of Christ, and (3) an apostle of Christ, even to the Gentiles. The attempt to kill, in vs. 22, is that described in xxi. 27-31. In the next attempt (xxiii. 10), there was no arrest, and the Sadducees, but not "the Jews," as such were the aggressors.

God's "help," here, is aid for defence against enemies, and was given because of the hostile attempts ("therefore," vs. 22).

The design and effect of the "help" and consequent preservation were Paul's testimony for Christ. Vs. 22. "To small and great," usually to the "small"; that is, the untitled many (1 Cor. i. 26); but occasionally, as at that moment, to the "great," the king and queen, the procurator and wife, and all the nobility and grandees of the capital. The Old Testament is cited because Agrippa held the Jewish faith, and because the plea was to prove that Paul had not broken with the Jewish Scriptures.

II. Festus to Paul. Verse 24.—An exclamation, but apparently not an interruption. Doubtless the solemn earnestness of Paul's manner, not less than his facts and doctrine, moved him to it. The "loud voice" betrayed strong emotion. To a Roman, visions and resurrections, and the presence and agency of spirits might seem as nonsensical as to a modern Materialist, and such a life as Paul's all governed by a down-right belief of such things he took as the fruit of insanity. See 2 Cor. v. 13. Paul's fame as a scholar ["much learning"] was doubtless well known to Festus. See xxii. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 13.

III. The Disavowal. Verses 25-27.—To vindicate both himself and the gospel, he first squarely denied what Festus affirmed, yet in terms of utmost respect and kindness, bringing no charge of lying or of ignorance—simply stating the fact in the plainest and kindest way. So much depends upon "manner" even Agrippa, the honored and royal guest of Festus, could bear him witness. In verse 26, "these things," and "this thing," designate the death and resurrection of Christ. The great publicity of the facts was due to the place (Jerusalem), the time (the Passover), and the circumstances.

To assume that Agrippa knew, and would attest the facts was complimentary to the king, and reasonable in view of his long and intimate relations with the nation. The question, "Believest thou the prophets," seems to be an implied appeal to him to admit also Paul's doctrine. Agrippa's faith was well known, and Paul understood that he was not ashamed of it.

IV. Agrippa to Paul. Verse 28.—All authorities agree that the word, "almost," is a wrong translation. The literal rendering is "in a little," etc. Dr. Hackett, and probably most scholars, understand, "in a little time"; that is, quickly art thou persuading me. Some "in [for with] little effort." In either case the answer is regarded as ironical. You bring me to pronounce for your facts and faith at once. Agrippa had nothing against him, and none of the persecuting bigotry (vs. 32), but to avow himself a "Christian" [a word of reproach] was another matter altogether. He put the whole matter away in a pleasant manner, as being quite out of the question—he a king, to become a Christian! even me thou art persuading to become a Christian in some little degree.

V. Paul's Reply to Agrippa. Verse 29.—His "heart's desire." Comp. Rom. x. 1. For the phrase "would to God," a more literally rendering is, "I could pray to God." 1 John v. 16. The rest of the company evidently were as little inclined to receive Christ as Agrippa, and so Paul joins them all in one. Mark, too, how the sympathy is felt and expressed by the prisoners for the rulers, not the reverse. He does not wish them to be in "bonds" for their faith. He

does not covet suffering for its own sake. Singular self control, urbanity, and fidelity.—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, November 25th, 1877.—Paul in the Storm.—Acts xxii. 14-26.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee."—Ps. lvi. 3.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS. In his speech, Paul went on to say that God had helped him to teach the things which both Moses and the prophets had said would happen—that Christ should suffer, and then be the first to rise from the dead, Festus who was a Roman, and knew nothing of the Scriptures, or Moses and the prophets, could not understand what Paul was talking about. It sounded very foolish to him, so he said, "Paul, thou art beside thyself; much study is making thee mad." But Agrippa though a wicked man, was a Jew, and had been taught all these things. So Paul said, "I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak words of truth, as the king knows: for these things were not done in a corner." Then, turning to Agrippa, he asked, "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest." Then, perhaps, Paul would have said, "If you do, how can you help believing that Jesus is the Saviour they told of?" But Agrippa replied, mockingly, "Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." And Paul answered in earnest, holding up his chained hands, "I pray to God that not only thou, but also all who hear me this day, were not only almost, but altogether, such as I am, except these bonds." The king quickly rose, to keep from hearing more; and his sister and Festus followed.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.

DORAS BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XLVI.—A WELCOME DECISION. Matthew had spent a most uncomfortable afternoon during Hugh's absence, thinking deeply all the while. Once he came to the conclusion that he ought to set Hugh entirely free to go and live with Dorothy, while he remained in the old place, trying to get out of his decaying business a scanty living for himself.

But while doing so he felt as if he was dooming himself to something as terrible as solitary confinement, or penal servitude; for his bird-selling had gradually become almost as distasteful an occupation to him as it was to Hugh. Commiseration for his little prisoners had so far been aroused that it made him uncomfortable to see the wings pent up, which God made to cleave the sunny air in joyous freedom. This was the chief reason why he did not replenish his stock when it slowly dwindled away. And when success came to Hugh, and the pleasant proposal was made that they should go and live in the country, Matthew hailed it with an eager delight which he so little betrayed that Hugh never suspected it. But now instead of its fulfilment being at hand, it seemed to Matthew that there was only blank disappointment, and that he would have to suffer a deprivation which completely daunted his sturdy, self-reliant nature.

He bowed his head in his hands in the silence of that golden September afternoon, as he sat beside a small fire, with his cat cooily purring at his feet; and he groaned within himself, not feeling that the solemn words were misapplied, 'If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will, but Thine be done!'

Then he prayed at greater length; for Matthew had learned to pray, and had many a time experienced the blessedness of holding communion with the Unseen. Many a time it might have been said of him,

"That his feeble hands and helpless Groping blindly in the darkness, Touching God's right hand in that darkness, And were lifted up and strengthened."

But now, where, before, all was dim, there was light at last, and he could call upon God, not doubtingly, but with blessed faith that he was heard; and that the answer would be wise and kind, whatever it might be. It was in a very

broken, illiterate fashion that he prayed; but the yearnings came from the depths of his heart, and were such prayers as 'move the arm that moves the world.'

He felt perfectly calm when he had cast his burden on the Lord, and left Him to undertake for him; and he awaited with composure and resignation Hugh's return, and the decision which he was determined should be made by Hugh. When the lad entered he hung up his hat, came and sat down right opposite to Matthew, and looked earnestly into his calm and serious face.

"Well, Mr. Pedder, have you been deciding for me in this quiet solitude?" he asked, pleasantly.

"No, my lad; you shall decide."

"Well, then, I have decided," replied Hugh. At which Matthew's heart beat quicker, and his dilating eyes asked eagerly for the decision. 'In the first place, Hugh went on, 'I am thoroughly determined that I will never leave you as long as you live, Mr. Pedder,—my truest friend, my best earthly friend! Matthew's face flushed, and he looked down on the floor, winking his eyes hard. 'And I should like my grandmother to decide for herself which of two things she will do,' Hugh added, pretending not to observe Matthew's emotion; 'either that she shall continue to live where she likes, while we allow her so much a week to live on; or else if you can bring yourself to agree to it, Mr. Pedder—that she shall come and live with us down in the country.'

Matthew's relief at being assured that he had not to part with his boy was so great that at that moment he felt he could endure fifty Dorothys, so long as he had Hugh. So he answered readily, but in a tremulous voice, 'Surely, surely, let her come and live with us, if she likes.'

He felt completely overwrought, and could not utter another word. He tried hard to control himself, bit his lip, fidgeted on his chair, and finally got up to look out of the window into the close back-yard. Hugh watched him with some concern, fancying that he was distressed at the thought of Dorothy's coming to live with them. Presently he saw him stealthily draw his handkerchief from his pocket and hold it to his face. Hugh could keep silence no longer: he went and stood at his left side, and gently laying his hand on Matthew's arm, he said, 'I'm afraid this arrangement distresses you, sir.'

Matthew turned quickly round on him, his face radiant though tearful, and exclaimed, 'God bless ye, my lad! I'm only a bit upset cos I'm so glad and thankful as you ain't goin' to leave me! Bless me!' he added, as he vigorously mopped his face, 'I'm sure I must be gettin' old to be such a Betty! It ain't like Matthew to be snivellin' in this fashion. But ye know I've bin bringin' my mind to give ye up, my lad, and now I finds you won't give me up, it's a little bit too much, that's all!'

Hugh put his hand caressingly round to Matthew's right shoulder, and said tenderly, 'No, dear Mr. Pedder, I could no more give you up than you could give me up. We must try to live happily all together.'

'I'm gettin' a old chap now, and so's Dorothy,' responded Matthew. 'We're both nigh to the bottom of the hill so if we don't manage to live jest like turtles, why it won't be long as we shall werret ye.'

'Ah, but I hope it will, worry or no worry!' exclaimed Hugh. Then to divert Matthew's mind and cheer him up a little, Hugh chatted away about his walk and talk with Lisa.

'Ay, poor little Lisa!' said Matthew, when he had finished, 'it do seem hard to leave her, poor lass! But, as you say, Hugh, we must run up and see her sometimes if the 'chequer' 'll allow it.'

'Oh, we'll make the exchequer allow it!' laughed Hugh.

When they went out to service together after tea they had both almost recovered their usual good spirits.

The next day Dorothy paid them a brief visit, and coldly decided to go with them into Kent. 'It's nothing but right,' she said, 'that if my grandson can rent a cottage I should go and keep house for him!'

So far their future was mapped out before them; and the next step to be taken was to try to get the old cottage, or one in the same village. In the evening of the same day, to

wards nine o'clock, Lisa entered the shop, rosy with rapid walking, and she said rather excitedly, 'Look here, Hugh, I've been getting our forewoman to look me up some soiled violets, and primroses, and anemones to-day, and I can group them almost as well as real ones. Look, what d'you think of that for your design?' And with a few light touches she arranged them in a delicate running pattern on the counter.

Hugh's face glowed with enthusiasm, and he exclaimed delightedly, 'Lisa, it's as certain that'll bring me success, as that the sun will rise to-morrow!'

(To be continued.)

"It Stings."

"How pretty!" cried little Sam, as his little fat hand grasped a bunch of white lilac which grew near the gate of his father's house. The next moment the child's face grew red with terror, and he dashed the lilac to the ground, shrieking, "It stings! it stings!"

What made it sting? It was a bright, beautiful, and sweet-smelling flower. How could it hurt the child's hand? I will tell you.

A merry little bee, in search of a dinner, had just pushed his nose in among the lilac blossoms, and was sucking the nectar from it most heartily when Sammy's eager grasp disturbed him; so being vexed with the child, he stung him. That's how Sammy's hand came to be hurt.

Sammy's mother washed the wound with harts-horn; and when the pain was gone, she said, "Sammy, my dear, let this teach you that many pretty things have very sharp stings."

Let every child take note of this: Many pretty things have sharp stings. It may save them from being stung if they keep this truth in mind.

Sin often makes itself appear very attractive. A boy once went to a circus because the horses were handsome and their riders gay; but he learned bad habits there, and thus that pretty thing—the circus—stung him.

A girl once took a luscious pear from a basket and ate it.

"Have you eaten one?" asked her mother, pleasantly.

Fearing she would not get another if she said "Yes," she wickedly replied, "No." She got another pear, but felt so stung that she could not sleep.

Thus you see that sin, however pleasant it looks, stings, and that sharply. It stings fatally. The Bible says: "The sting of death is sin." Never forget that "many pretty things have very sharp stings," and be careful how you touch them.—Young Reaper.

SHINTOISM.—President Clark, of the Massachusetts State Agriculture College, who has just returned from Japan, gave his impressions of the people of Amherst on Sunday evening. Among other things he said:

The Japanese are a people, able and willing to do right. I never saw a quarrel in Japan, and never saw nor heard of a Japanese student in America or Japan accused of immorality. I selected from a thousand young men the students for the college there, and never knew one of them that would willingly offend his teachers. The Japanese will walk right up like men and be Christians. I have great faith in a people that have such aspirations. They have great capacity for usefulness in the conversion of the world, and are the men of all others to be missionaries in China. Until last year Shintoism has been the State religion since 600 years before Christ. It is a sort of natural religion, and they worship the Sun God, and this religion, heathenism, or whatever it is, has made Japan what it is. Since 600 years before Christ, when the fine Mikado reigned, they have all been from the same family. Of all heathen religions Shintoism is the least objectionable, and if I ever become a heathen I shall be a Shintoist.

PRE-HISTORIC TIMES.—The operation of the law which has ever since the creation of man diminished the races of animals which, from their size or venom, would have proved fatal to his progress, is illustrated by the decline of tigers and of deadly snakes as high cultivation extends in India. And yet the death rate in the latter country is said to be still 4,000 from tigers and 8,000 from snakes. This surely implies that the millennium must be yet a long way off? Would that our sportsmen, whose vacation causes so much heart-burning in the preservation of game here, could turn their efforts towards the work of exterminating creatures which become the real enemies of man in advancing civilization.