

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, June 23rd, 1878.—The decree of Cyrus.—2 Chron. xxxvi. 22, 23.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 22, 23.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned."—Isaiah xl. 2.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Isaiah xlv. 21-28. Tuesday, Isa. xlv. Wednesday, Jeremiah xxv. 1-14. Thursday, Jeremiah xxix. 10-19. Friday, Jer. i. 1-20. Saturday, Ezekiel xx. 33-49. Sunday, Psalm cxxvi.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Cyrus Divinely instructed. Vs. 22. II. His proclamation. Vs. 23.

QUESTIONS.—What was one blessed result of the captivity? Ans.—The overthrow of Jewish idolatry.

Vs. 22. What prophets had foretold the return of the Jews? How did God bring his purpose about? What does Isaiah call Cyrus? Isa. xlv. 28. How was Cyrus a shepherd?

Vs. 23. What does Cyrus mean by his being charged by the Lord? Besides bidding the Jews return to their land, what does Cyrus permit them to do? What blessing does he utter upon them in returning?

Where does this lesson teach God's overruling providence? Where God's gracious loving-kindness? Where God's faithfulness to his promises? Where God's control of kings? Prov. xxi. 1. Are the Jews still under Divine promise? Rom. xi.

Read Psalm cxxvi, as a closing exercise.

CYRUS.—Almost all the kings of the earth, prior to Cyrus, had been either the open oppressors or the seductive allies of the Jews. Cyrus was at once their generous liberator and guardian. He had been the founder of the Persian Empire, had conquered Babylon, and given it in trust to Darius, after whose short reign he himself came to Babylon, took control of affairs, and, in the first year of his reign over the wide domain of the East, issued that edict of Jewish emancipation for which he will ever be praised.

"The character of Cyrus, as represented to us by the Greeks, is the most favorable that we possess of any Oriental monarch. Active, energetic, brave, fertile in stratagems, he has all the qualities required to form a successful military chief. The Persians, contrasting him with their later monarchs, held his memory in the highest veneration, and were even led by their affection for his person to make his type of countenance their standard of physical beauty.

The genius of Cyrus was essentially that of a conqueror, not of an administrator. There is no trace of his having adopted anything like a uniform system for the government of the provinces which he subdued. . . . Policy may have dictated the course pursued in each instance, which may have been suited to the conditions of the several provinces; but the variety allowed was fatal to consolidation, and the monarchy as Cyrus left it had as little cohesion as any of those by which it was preceded.

Though originally a rude mountain chief, Cyrus, after he succeeded to the empire showed himself quite able to appreciate the dignity and value of art.

In his domestic affairs he showed the same moderation and simplicity that we observe in his general conduct. He married, as it would seem, one wife only, Cassandane. By her he had issue, two sons, and at least three daughters.

EXPOSITION.—I. Introductory Notes.—The closing verses of 2 Chronicles are the opening verses of the Book of Ezra. In the latter, a part of the proclamation of Cyrus is given, which is omitted in Chronicles. For completeness, that part also will be considered in the Exposition. If, as not improbable, Ezra was the compiler of the two Books of Chronicles, the repetition is the more natural.

The present lesson closes the advance in the Old Testament for the present year. We have traced the history of the separate kingdom of Judah, and the restoration, of which this lesson treats, was not simply a new epoch in the Judah kingdom, but a reconstruction of a general kingdom of Israel; since members of all the tribes were invited to join, and accepted the invitation. Hence we see the separate fragmentary kingdom succeeded by an integral kingdom.

II. Explanation of the Text.—Verse 22.—In the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia.—The Persians were an Aryan people, who came from the borders of the Caspian. The kingdom was established about a century before this Cyrus. And yet the sovereignty, "at any rate in the time immediately preceding Cyrus, was not independent, but subject to the stronger Media kingdom. Cyrus, brought up at the court of the Median sovereign, saw the luxury and consequent weakness of the kingdom, and managed to lead his own people, the Persians, to a successful revolt. This was B. C. 558—twenty years before his conquest of Babylon, and twenty-two years before his assumption of the sovereignty over Babylonia in his own person." "The first year of Cyrus," in our verse, is the first year after Darius, the Mede. Cyrus was a mighty warrior, and constantly engaged at the head of his armies in reducing to submission the various kingdoms of Western Asia. His success against Babylon "added to the empire the rich and valuable provinces of Babylonia, Lusiana, Syria, and Palestine; thus augmenting its size by about 240,000 or 250,000 square miles." Thus did he become the mightiest monarch on the face of the earth. As "king of Persia," he was the world's sovereign.

That word of the Lord [Jehovah], etc.—The prediction that the captivity should end after seventy years. Jer. xxv. 12, 13; xxix. 10; xxxiii. 10-14. These years are reckoned from the first conquest over Judah, described in vs. 6, 7, when Daniel and his companions were taken to Babylon (B. C. 606). This was God's prediction, and must be fulfilled.

The Lord [Jehovah] stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, etc.—By what means, or whether without means, is not stated. He took care to see that his prediction should not fail to accomplish the purposes in mind when making the prediction. It has been very fitly suggested that Daniel, being such as he was, and in such high office (Dan. vi. 28), was probably a chief agent and instrument, under God, in securing the result; that his effort would be favored, partly by the predictions of Isaiah (xlv. 26-28; xiv. 1-4), in which Cyrus was named as God's agent in the restoration of Israel—predictions then nearly two centuries old; partly by certain religious affinities between the Persian and the Hebrew. God knows how to turn, at will, even those who know not him.

That he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom. The whole kingdom may here mean only the province or realm of Babylonia, as it was there that the Jews were, in the main; and it was this kingdom that is specially in the writer's mind, as also it was in Daniel's mind, when writing his book. It may, however, be universal, so far as the Jews were dispersed. Recent excavations have brought to light a vast quantity of the longburied literary treasures of those old kingdoms and times.

Verse 23.—All the kingdoms of the earth.—This was no empty boasting, but a statement of the simple, but vast fact, as shown above. The Lord [Jehovah] God of heaven given me. Intended as it was for the Jews, it would meet at once his view and the king's to give to the God of heaven the name by which the Jews knew and called upon him. Rawlinson says on this passage "that it is remarkable, among heathen documents, for both its religious character, and its recognition of God's unity"; but adds that both of these particulars "receive abundant illustration from the Persian cuneiform [wedge-shaped letters] inscriptions, in which the recognition of a single supreme God, Ormuzd, and the clear and constant ascription to him of the direction of all mundane affairs, are leading features. . . . No public monuments with such a pervading religious spirit have ever been discovered among the records of any heathen nation, as those of the Persian kings.

He hath charged me to build him a house, etc.—No doubt a reference to the passages in Isaiah, as above cited, but especially to Isa. xlv. 28, where Cyrus is named, and the founding and erecting of the Temple are predicted as to be from him. He recognized the message as from the true God, and so obeyed it. Herein he is an example for us, and for all.

Who is there among you of all his people?—The universality of the proclamation is thus emphasized. There is no exclusion of any tribe, rank, or person of the Hebrews. Indeed the language would seem to include also any proselyte to the Jewish faith. The Lord his God be with him. A most generous, as well as pious benediction, evidently as hearty in spirit as in form. The best evidence of his heartiness is given in Ezra i. 7-11. Let him go up. Babylonia was on the plain, and to go, in any direction, into other countries, would be to go up. We mark here, not only consent, but urgency. The king desired the Jews to accept their privileges.

Ezra i. 3.—(He is God.)—This parenthetic clause seems to be the monarch's judgment that the God of the Hebrews is the same as that of the Persians.

Ezra i. 4.—This verse shows still further that the king would provide for the erection of the Temple by aid from the Jews remaining in Babylonia, and from their heathen neighbors. The response given to this grand proclamation is described in Ezra and Nehemiah, but especially in Ezra i. 2. Dr. Smith (Old Testament History), says: "As the Israelites had gone forth from the first captivity laden with the spoils of Egypt, so now they returned from the second enriched with the free-will offerings of the Assyrians, consecrated to the service of Jehovah. But they carried back greater riches than all the treasures of Persia, in the moral gains of their captivity." The first caravan numbered 42,360, besides 7,367 servants. "Others remained behind, forming what was called 'the dispersion'; and how numerous these were in all the provinces of the Empire, we see from the Book of Esther."—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 30th, 1878.—Review.—Seven Old Testament periods.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"He expounded unto them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." Luke xxiv. 27.

The Story of the Bible Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

You remember there were two silver arms, or two kings—Darius and Cyrus—Darius, the Mede, died only two years after Babylon was taken; then Cyrus, the Persian, reigned alone. Now we have something very wonderful, to show us how God knows all things that will happen. Nearly two hundred years before Cyrus was born, the prophet Isaiah, who lived when good King Hezekiah was king, said of Cyrus—"He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the Temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." Isa. xlv. 28. God had also foretold all about the taking of Babylon, long before the captives were sent there: "Thus saith the Lord to Cyrus, . . . I will open before him the two-leaved gates. . . . I will break in pieces the gates of brass." Isa. xlv. 1, 2. Daniel must have read these wonderful words to the king from his rolls, or books. They showed Cyrus that the Lord knew him before he had ever heard of the Lord. Cyrus was a heathen himself, but he felt that such a God must be the true one. And now the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to do what God had planned so many years before that he should do. The king wrote a letter to all the people in his kingdom, saying that the Lord God of heaven had made him king, and had charged him to build God a house at Jerusalem: and he said, "Let all among you who are the people of God return to Jerusalem, and build his house." Cyrus also commanded his people to give the Jews gold and silver for their journey, besides horses and camels and asses to ride on. He himself gave them back all the gold and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar had taken away from the Temple. There were fifty-four hundred of these.

Father Hyacinthe is now in Paris where he will remain at least for the summer, if not permanently. Visitors to the Exhibition will have an opportunity of hearing the great French orator. He is now not only permitted to come, but the government offers him the use of the vast Hall of the Exhibition, wishing him to speak there, which he will do during May and June.

Booths' Department.

"Repent ye"

It was Sunday afternoon. Ned Mills had just come from Sunday-school, and was lying on his back before the wood fire in the sitting-room, his arms thrown back over his head, his eyes fixed on the ceiling. What was he thinking about? So his mother thought, as she lay on the lounge at the other side of the room.

Father and Mary had gone to meeting. Mrs. Mills had stayed at home with a severe headache; and the truth was, Ned did not like "meeting" very well; it was "so awfully solemn," he said.

"Mother," said he at last, "right over our class in Sunday-school is a motto—'Repent ye,' in big letters. What does repent mean, anyway?"

"I think you know, Ned, don't you?" "Well, I s'pose it means to be sorry when you've done anything wrong; told a lie, or stole a watermelon."

"Yes," said his mother. You see she knew all about Ned, so she said nothing more, but waited for him to go on.

"Well, I don't see through it," said he, at length.

"Why not?"

"I'll tell you. Don't you remember how Jimmy Foster and I hooked one of old Simpson's watermelons last summer?"

"I remember you took one of Mr. Simpson's melons without leave."

"And you knew how father made me go round and tell him I was sorry, and all that; but the watermelon was gone; we'd eaten that up, long before. Now I want to know what good it did to say I was sorry?"

Now his mother's head ached badly all this time; but Ned, careless boy, never thought of it; and she, good woman, did not remind him.

"Ned, do you remember when Davy Jones took the mince turnover from your dinner-basket at school?"

"I guess I do! Wasn't I mad though I tell you, sir, I'd have given it to him, sir, if?"

"If what, Ned?"

"Well," said Ned, less excitedly, "if he hadn't come round and said he was awful sorry, and how he was hungry, and never'd tasted a mince turnover in all his life."

"But what good did that do? Your turnover was all gone."

"That's so," said Ned, soberly. "But you see, I didn't know he was hungry, and he looked so sorry, I couldn't help pitying him; so I told him it was no matter, I didn't care, and he needn't."

Ned was not used to arguing, and he fell right into the trap his mother had set for him.

"That is just the good it did Farmer Simpson to have you tell him you were sorry for stealing his watermelon. He pitied you so much, that he did not care about the watermelon any longer."

"H'm!" said Ned, thoughtfully. "I s'pose that's the way God feels, ain't it, mother?"

"Exactly, Ned."

"At, mother!"

"Well, Ned?"

"People ought not to sin because they know they can repent afterwards, ought they?"

"Of course not."

"I suppose God would not be so willing to forgive them, would he?"

"I think not, Ned."

"But if they are truly sorry, they'd better say so, hadn't they?"

"Certainly."

"Hallo, there's Mary and father!" cried Ned, jumping up; "and, I declare! I forgot you had a headache. I didn't mean to say a word. What a boy I am!"

"A pretty good boy, after all," thought his mother.

A Court better than a Fight.

One morning, on my walk down town, I was passing through that quiet, old-fashioned quarter of the city of New York which used to be the village of Greenwich. I saw, on the side-walk before me, half a dozen boys surrounding two others who stood up bravely toward each other, nearly in the fashion of two chickens expecting to fight, but not quite ready to begin. The smaller boy held one hand behind him, and in that hand was a whip. As I approached the larger boy looked at me hesitatingly, and finally said:

"Say, mister, won't you make him give me my whip?"

"Taint his; it's mine."

Hereupon there was nearly an outbreak of hostilities. "Here," said I to myself, "is the old question which has interfered with quarrels for eighteen centuries. Is it possible to substitute a peaceful arbitration for a free fight?" I looked round upon the crowd of boys; for by this time fifteen had gathered about. They were evidently favorably inclined to the spectacle of a fight. They looked at me curiously, as if wondering whether I would interfere, and what sort of a fist I should make of it in quelling the combat.

"Well," said I, addressing myself to the two boys in the centre of the ring, "if you want to settle your question as boys generally do, you'll have to fight it out yourselves; but if you want to settle it as men settle such questions, I'll help you. But if you want me to settle it, you must first agree to do just as I say. You must abide by my decision."

Each was evidently reluctant to agree to this, fearing that the decision would be against him; but finally both promised.

I did not think that it would do to rest on the promise alone. It would be a good joke to investigate the case, and command the possessor of the whip to give it up, and then the rogue should take to his heels with the whip and laugh at me.

So I told the boys that when men choose a judge to decide claims to property, they also choose a sheriff to attend the court and execute the judgment. We must also have a sheriff. I looked around the circle, who were all attending to the proceedings with eagerness. I saw a stout, good-natured, plucky looking lad, a size or two larger than the combatants. I asked him if he would be sheriff.

"Yes, sir, I'll be sheriff."

"Very good," said I. "Whatever I decide you must make 'em obey. If I say he must give up the whip, you must make him do it. Take it away from him if he won't. And if I say he is to keep the whip you must protect him and not let the other boy get it away. You are not to do anything cruel, or ugly, or brutal. I choose you because you are a good-natured looking boy, and I don't think you would abuse your power. But you must make 'em obey."

By this time quite a group of boys from every quarter had arrived on the scene, and crowded about. The sheriff's hands doubled up into fists, and I could see his elbows moving as he edged himself forward, as if his dignity and authority required a little more room.

"Yes, sir, I'll do it," said he.

Then I asked the story of the whip; and then the boys all began to talk at once. Finally we settled it that it would be fair to let the boy who claimed the whip tell his story first.

"It's my whip. I made it, and I lost it; and he stole it. Give it to me." This last he said to the other boy with a gesture that no doubt would have been a blow or a grab if the sheriff had not been on hand.

Then, in answer to my inquiry, the other boy said: "It's my whip, I found it and it belongs to me."

Next we called for the witnesses. A boy in the crowd said, pointing to the claimant, "It's his whip, sir. He made it, and his father gave him a lash. Rumney and some other boys were playing with it last night, and they threw it over the fence into this boy's area," pointing to the possessor of the whip.

"Yes, that's where I found it," said the latter, "in my father's area; and it belongs to me."

There were no witnesses to the contrary of this; so the facts were made plain.

I explained to the boys that a thing belonged to a person who made it, if he made it of his own materials, because it was produced by his time and skill and ingenuity. If he lost it, it did not cease to become his. If another found it, he had a right to take possession of it and keep it from everybody but the true owner, but as the true owner appeared the finder must give it up.

"So my decision is," I concluded, turning to the possessor, "that you must give up the whip."

The boy clutched a little tighter and hesitated; first he looked at me, then he looked at the sheriff, then at the whip; then, with one eye on the sheriff and the most comical expression on his face he gave up the whip.

The boys laughed, and the court adjourned.—Christian Weekly.

The Times and Daily News are now placed in telephonic communication with the House of Commons, thus enabling their editors to remain in their offices, and listen to the debates as they proceed in the House.

A swarm of bees was recently discovered under the eaves of the Congregational church in Boscawen, New Houduras, and with sixty-nine pounds of honey taken from their hiding-place, a festival was held, which brought the church a large sum.