

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1878.

SUNDAY, May 26th, 1878.—The Fiery Furnace.—Dan. iii. 21-27.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 23-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from this burning fiery furnace.”—Dan. iii. 17.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Daniel iii. Tuesday, Psalm vii. Wednesday, Isaiah xliii. Thursday, Revelation vii. Friday, 2 Timothy iv. Saturday, Hebrews xi. Sunday, Matthew v.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Cast into the furnace. Vs. 21. II. Abettors consumed. Vs. 22. III. Martyrs saved. Vs. 23-25. IV. Effect on Nebuchadnezzar. Vs. 26, 27.

QUESTIONS.—What effect had the interpretation of his dream upon Nebuchadnezzar? Dan. ii. 46-49. What change in the king afterward took place? What was the penalty for refusing to worship his image? Whose refusal to worship? Why? What did the king say to them? Vs. 14, 15. What was their reply? Vs. 16-18.

Vs. 21. How were these men bound before they were thrown into the furnace? How great had been the increase of the furnace heat? Vs. 19. How did this undesignedly enhance the miracle?

Vs. 22. What men did the fire consume? Were they more guilty than the king? Why was not the king slain?

Vs. 24. At what was the king astonished?

Vs. 25. Who was “the fourth”? What promises are now fulfilled? Isaiah xliiii. 2; Luke xxi. 18. What record was furnished to Paul? Hebrews xi. 34.

Vs. 26. What respectful words does the king now utter? Whom does he call together? The Chaldeans worshipped fire. How has God been seen to treat it?

Years passed on, and what Jerome says was true of the Babylonian king: “We soon forget the truth. He who had been worshipping the servant of God as if he were God, now makes an image of himself, that he may be worshipped.” He goes further still. He makes the penalty for refusing to worship his image, “to be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace”—a form of punishment which the Assyrian monuments show to have been common, centuries before the days of Nebuchadnezzar. At the set time of worship, however, a few men remained standing. They would not prostrate themselves before the image. They were accused, brought before the king, offered another trial, and threatened; but they replied that they would not serve the king's gods, nor worship the image that he had set up. Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury. The heat of the furnace was greatly increased, and the “three worthies,” as they are called, were thrown into it.

EXPOSITION.—The date (B. C. 580) is not certain. The place (Vs. 1) may perhaps be marked by a row of mounds near the ruins of Babylon, as these mounds bear the name of Dura, and one of them—46 feet square, and 19½ feet high, of unburnt brick—may have served for the pedestal of this very image. The height of the image (90 feet, vs. 1), doubtless includes the pedestal; as otherwise its breadth (nine feet) would be out of proportion for the human figure. “Herodotus writes that in his time there was at Babylon an idol-image of gold, twelve cubits high.” The material is said to be gold, perhaps wood, covered with gold; to fall down before it was to recognize them as the sovereign power, to the dawning of Jehovah.

Verses 21.—These men.—For their original names, see i. 19; for their office, and cause of their promotion, see ii. 49; for their offence, and the fact and motive of its disclosure, see iii. 12. The fierce wrath of the king to them shows no hostility to the Jews as a class, nor a forgetfulness of the services of Daniel. Chaps. i. 2. He could not, as a heathen, understand the religious views and spirit of the Jews. His conduct is perfectly natural for such a sovereign. Bound, etc. Punishment by burning was common, even long before this, in the time of the Assyrian kingdom. Herodotus says “Babylonian costume consisted of three parts: 1, wide, long pantaloons; 2, a woolen shirt; 3, an outer mantle, with a girdle round it.” Cast into the midst, etc. We may conjecture that the furnace was so constructed, that from above the men could be thrown

in through an opening, while there was also an open door at the side by which it was fed with fuel, through which the king looked in, and the three came out. Vs. 25, 26. The three words, “burning fiery furnace,” together express the fury of the present heat. Vs. 10.

Verses 22.—The king's commandment was urgent.—Literally, was harsh. The heat of the furnace was to be as furious as the heat of his wrath. Slew those men, etc. Making more obvious the greatness of the miracle of their deliverance.

Verses 23.—Fell down bound.—Apparently referring to the death of “those that had taken them up.” Vs. 21.

Verses 24.—Was astonished, etc.—Showing that he had been sitting, looking on to enjoy the spectacle, and gratify his wrath. He was again reminded that the God of Daniel and of these men was mightier than he and all his gods. Did not we cast. There had been little of counsel in giving the edict, but the king had given the matter in charge to officers.

Verses 25.—Four men.—All called men, because even the fourth had a human form. Loose. The metal chains were dissolved, though they were the very things that would naturally be the last to dissolve. Everything that was against them was brought to nought. Walking in the midst of the fire. Not only not consumed, but freely walking, and that in the very midst of the fiery fury. Hebrews xi. 34. The Son of God. Or, rather, a Divine being, according to his heathenish conceptions of gods many.

Verses 26.—Came near to the mouth, etc. See above, on verse 21. We see in this action the emotion of the king, changed from desire for the death of the three to desire for their presence. Ye servants of the most high God. He thus owns their God to be the highest, though he does not disown his nation's gods. Come forth, come forth. God would compel the king's acknowledgment, which was made in this call. Acts xvi. 36-40.

Verses 27.—The princes. They were, in immense numbers, present from all parts, on occasion of the dedication of the image. Whether Daniel was present, or how it comes that throughout no mention is made of him, is not known. Upon whose bodies, etc. All this language is framed to express, in the strongest way, the completeness of God's protection of them. For the immediate results of the miracle, see verses 27-30.

I. The Execution.—Verse 21.—(1) The sentence was rigidly executed. Piety crossed the will of earthly power, and so the blow fell. (2) The execution did not move the confessors from their confession. They knew that God might save them—they did not know that he would. Better to die than to sin.

II. The Accident.—Verse 22.—(1) Death struck those for whom it was not intended. There is only one Being whose plans are sure never to fail. (2) The slain were not the objects of special Divine wrath. They were discriminated from God's three servants.

III. The Astonishment.—Verses 24, 25.—(1) The fact of it is noteworthy: God can make the mightiest wonder at a might that is mightier than that of the mightiest. (2) Its effect upon the king's wrath is to be marked. The wrath was gone. The men he saw were not in his power. Their act which he had condemned a greater than he had approved. The judgment of God, thus enforced, he could not but respect. (3) The effect upon his conduct corresponded. He was as eager to save as he had been to slay. He could respect a revelation of Divine power, even though blind to a revelation of Divine goodness.

IV. The Deliverance.—Verses 26, 27.—(1) It was complete. Even the king's hostility had turned to favor, while their person and clothes were unharmed, their reputation was greatly increased. (2) It was so manifested to the assembled magnates as to glorify the God of the Hebrews, and thus serve the interests of the Hebrews. God was thus caring for the unnamed captives, in his care for the three.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, June 2nd, 1878.—The Handwriting on the Wall.—Dan. v. 22-31.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“TRICK; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.”—Daniel v. 27.

The possession of religious knowledge may be fatally but easily mistaken for the possession of real religion.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

Nebuchadnezzar made a large golden image. He said that all who did not fall down and worship it should be cast into a burning fiery furnace. But Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would not worship the image. The king asked them whether it was true that they had not obeyed his orders; and said if they would yet fall down and worship the image, well; but if not, they should at once be cast into the burning furnace, and their God could not deliver them. They answered, “Our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us out of thine hand, O king; but if not—” If God did not think best to deliver them even then they would not serve other gods. The king then ordered the strongest men he had to bind them, and throw them, just as they were, with their clothes on, into the furnace, which was heated seven times hotter than usual. It was so hot, that the men who threw them in fell down dead with the heat of the fire outside. Suddenly the king got up in haste, and asked if they did not throw three men in the fire. “True, O king,” said those with him. “I see four walking about, and they are not hurt, and the fourth is like the Son of God,” said the king; and he called to the men to come forth. They came out, and their hair was not even singed, and their clothes did not even smell of the fire.

Boys' Department.

Old Soup.

The following curious anecdote is from a book about elephants, written by a French gentleman, named Jacolliot, and we will let the author tell his own story:

In the autumn of 1876 I was living in the interior of Bengal, and I went to spend Christmas with my friend, Major Daly. The major's bungalow was on the banks of the Ganges near Cawnpore. He had lived there a good many years, being chief of the quartermaster's department at that station, and had a great many natives, elephants, bullock-carts, and soldiers under his command.

On the morning after my arrival, after a cup of early tea (often taken before daylight in India), I sat smoking with my friend in the veranda of his bungalow, looking out upon the windings of the sacred river. And, directly, I asked the major about his children (a boy and a girl), whom I had not yet seen, and begged to know when I should see them.

“Soupramany has taken them out fishing,” said their father.

“Why, isn't Soupramany your great war-elephant?” I cried.

“Exactly so. You cannot have forgotten Soupramany!”

“Of course not. I was here, you know, when he had that fight with the elephant who went mad while loading a transport with bags of rice down yonder. I saw the mad elephant when he suddenly began to fling the rice into the river. His mahout tried to stop him, and he killed the mahout. The native sailors ran away to hide themselves, and the mad elephant, trumpeting, charged into this inclosure. Old Soupramany was here, and so were Jim and Bessy. When he saw the mad animal, he threw himself between him and the children. The little ones and their nurses had just time to get into the house when the fight commenced.”

“Yes,” said the major. “Old Soup was a hundred years old. He had been trained to war, and to fight with the rhinoceros, but he was too old to hunt them.”

“And yet,” said I, becoming animated by the recollections of that day, “what a gallant fight it was! Do you remember how we all stood on this porch and watched it, not daring to fire a shot lest we should hit Old Soupramany? Do you remember, too, his look when he drew off, after fighting an hour and a half, leaving his savers dyed in the dust, and walked straight to the ‘corral,’ shaking his great ears which had been badly torn, with his head bruised, and a great piece broken from one of his tusks?”

“Yes, indeed,” said the major. “Well, since then, he is more devoted to my dear little ones than ever. He takes them out whole days, and I am perfectly

content to have them under his charge. I don't like trusting Christian children to the care of natives; but with Old Soup I know they can come to no harm.”

“What! you trust children under ten years of age to Soup, without any other protection?”

“I do,” replied the major. “Come along with me, if you doubt, and we will surprise them at their fishing.”

I followed Major Daly, and, after walking half a mile along the wooded banks of the river, we came upon the little group. The two children—Jim, the elder, being about ten—both sat still and silent, for a wonder, each holding a rod, with line, cork, hook and bait, anxiously watching the gay corks bobbing in the water. Beside them stood Old Soup with an extremely large bamboo rod in his trunk, with line, hook, bait, and cork, like the children's. I need not say I took small notice of the children, but turned all my attention to their big companion. I had not watched him long before he had a bite; for, as the religion of the Hindoos forbids them to take life, the river swarms with fishes.

The old fellow did not stir; his little eyes watched his line eagerly; he was no novice in “the gentle craft.” He was waiting till it was time to draw in his prize.

At the end of his line, as he drew it up, was dangling one of those golden tench so abundant in the Ganges.

When Soupramany perceived what a fine fish he had caught, he uttered one of those long, low gurgling notes of satisfaction by which an elephant expresses joy; and he waited patiently, expecting Jim to take his prize off the hook and put on some more bait for him. But Jim, the little rascal, sometimes liked to plague Old Soup. He nodded at us, as much as to say, “Look and you'll see fun, now!” Then he took off the fish, which he threw into a water-jar placed there for the purpose, and went back to his place without putting any bait on Old Soup's hook. The intelligent animal did not attempt to throw his line into the water. He tried to move Jim by low, pleading tones. It was curious to see what tender cries he seemed to try to give his voice.

Seeing that Jim paid no attention to his calls, but sat and laughed as he handled his own line, Old Soup went up to him, and with his trunk tried to turn his head in the direction of the bait-box. At last, when he found that, all he could do would not induce his wilful friend to help him, he turned round as if struck by a sudden thought, and snatching up in his trunk the box that held the bait, came and laid it down at the major's feet; then picking up his rod, he held it out to his master.

“What do you want me to do with this, Old Soup?” said the major.

The creature lifted one great foot after the other, and again began to utter his plaintive cry. Out of mischief, I took Jimmy's part, and, picking up the bait-box, pretended to run with it. The elephant was not going to be teased by me. He dipped his trunk into the Ganges, and in an instant squirted a stream of water over me with all the force and precision of a fire engine, to the immense amusement of the children.

The major at once made Soup a sign to stop, and to make my peace with the fine old fellow, I baited his hook myself. Quivering with joy, as a baby does when it gets hold at last of a plaything some one has taken from it, Old Soupramany hardly paused to thank me by a soft note of joy for baiting his line for him, before he went back to his place, and was watching his cork as it trembled in the ripples of the river.—St. Nicholas for May.

The Grasshopper and its Tale.

Whenever I go to London I always stand at the corner of the Bank of England for a minute or two, watching the crowd of busy men hurrying everywhere. What thousands of cares they carry! How many anxieties! Then I look at the Royal Exchange. It is pleasant to see the London sparrows, though they are a little black and grimy, chirping on the massive cornices, as free and happy as possible, above the din and awful hurry of the great city. They have no cares, no anxieties. They seem to know what the great letters mean,

which are cut in the stones on which they hop. “The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof.” God keeps the sparrows, and they are happy. I wish the busy city men would watch the sparrows, and read the great city text.

But the sparrows and the text are not the most attractive things about the Exchange, and I am sure if you look at it, you would think as I do—that the weathercock is the most singular and curious thing about the building. It is not like any other weathercock in England, or I should think in the world; for there, twisting on the pinnacle of the spire, is a monster grasshopper; and I'll tell you how it came to be there.

About three hundred and fifty years ago, a woman with a little baby in her arms was trudging along a country lane. Presently, after looking to see that no one was watching her, she climbed over a gate into the field, and wrapping the baby in its little shawl, she laid it down in the grass, so gently as not to awake it, and then, never even looking behind her, she climbed over the gate again into the lane, and went on her journey.

The baby soon awoke, and began to cry; and it cried for a long, long time. And at last, tired and hungry, and hot with the sun, for it was a fine summer's day, it was wearied out, and dropped off to sleep again. “But God had heard the voice of the lad,” and see how simply he brought help for the little one.

By-and-by, down the lane came a schoolboy; he was whistling away, as happy as ever he could be. He had come out of school and was going home. He lived at the farmhouse a little way further up the lane. Now he gathered a few primroses, now he scampered after a butterfly, now he had a shy at a bird; but just as he came to the gate over which the woman had climbed, he heard a grasshopper chirping away so loudly, that he sprang over the gate to catch him; and there was the baby, fast asleep! Far more pleased than if he had caught a hundred grasshoppers, the boy took up the little fellow, and ran home with his prize. The kind farmer's wife, although she had many children of her own, at once determined to keep the little orphan who had been saved from death by a grasshopper.

Years passed away and the baby became a strong boy; the boy grew to be a man; he went to London, and became a merchant. God blessed all he did, and he rose to be the most noted man in the city. Queen Elizabeth was then on the throne, and often did she send for Sir Thomas Gresham, for the little deserted boy had become a knight, to consult him on the great affairs of State.

Just three hundred years ago Sir Thomas Gresham founded the Exchange. The Queen came to dine with him, and to lay the first stone; and there, upon the topmost pinnacle, Sir Thomas placed a grasshopper; and there it is to-day, to tell the busy, toiling city, and to tell you and me, when we go to see the city, that Almighty God will hear the infant's cry, and can save a valuable life by even such a little thing as a grasshopper.

So it was that “God heard the voice of the lad.”—Presbyterian.

“Try Him wi' a text.”

“What's wrang wi' ye noo? I thoct ye were a' right,” said a ragged boy, himself rejoicing in the Saviour, to another, who a few nights ago professed to be able to trust Jesus, but again began to doubt. “What's wrang wi' ye noo, man?” “Man, I am no right yet,” replied the other, “for Satan's aye tempting me.” “And what dae ye the'n? I try to sing a hymn.” “And does that not send him awa?” “No, I'm as bad as ever.” Weel,” said the other, “next time try him wi' a text; he'll stan that.” In other words—the only weapon with which we can overcome Satan in all his conflicts with us, is the Word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit. The Lord Jesus proved the power of this weapon to overcome. (Luke iv. 4, 13). Let us do likewise.

A lovely countenance is the fairest of all sights, and the sweetest harmony in the world is the sound of the voice of her whom we love.

To do good to men is the great work of life; to make them true Christians is the greatest good we can do them.