

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, February 2nd, 1879.—The Reading of the Law.—Neh. viii. 1-8.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 1-3.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple."—Psalm cxix. 130.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Neh. viii. Tuesday, Deut. xxxi. 1-13. Wednesday, Revelation xxii. 18-21. Thursday, Psalm xix. Friday, Luke iv. 16-32. Saturday, Psalm cxix. 1-16. Sunday, Deut. xxvii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. God's law desired. Vs. 1. II. God's law read. Vss. 2-6. III. God's law expounded. Vss. 7, 8.

QUESTIONS.—When did Nehemiah finish the walls of Jerusalem? Neh. vi. 15. During their progress what grievances did he redress? Chap. v. What plots did he escape? vi. 1-4. What public interests did he consider? Chap. vii.

I. Vs. 1.—Why do the people now seek God's law? Why did they assemble in the street before the water gate? Why did they call Ezra forth?

II. Vss. 2-6.—Who were included in this congregation? Comp. Deut. xxxi. 12, 13. How was Ezra "God's mouth to the people"? Vs. 3. On what did he stand in reading? Who were his assistants?

III. Vss. 7, 8.—How many priests aided Ezra in explaining the Law? What three things characterized the religious instruction given? What one thing should all religious teachers aim at?

Nehemiah had defended his people against opposition abroad, had relieved the grievances of the poor at home (Chap. v), had finished the work of rebuilding the walls in spite of plotting enemies and treacherous friends (Chap. vi) had seen the city well kept and well peopled (Chap. vii), and now attends to a piece of work that might have been done in part, at least, before, but probably was not. For while Ezra had come up to Jerusalem twelve or thirteen years in advance of Nehemiah, and was a greater scholar than Nehemiah, he was not of such lively, active spirit. "Nehemiah's zeal it was that set Ezra's learning at work," and then great things were done.

EXPOSITION.—The present lesson presents to us a scene of a popular assembly gathered in the open air to receive through God's ministers instruction from his holy word. It sets forth (1.) The gathering of the assembly. (2.) The purpose of the gathering. (3.) The carrying out of the purpose.

I. THE ASSEMBLY.—(1.) Of all the people. (2.) In a public square adjoining the temple. (3.) On the first day of Tisri (September-October). Vss. 1, 2.

II. THE PURPOSE.—That the law might be (1.) Read. (2.) Explained. (3.) Understood. Vss. 3.

III. ACCOMPLISHMENT.—(1.) The pulpit (or rather the platform).—(a) the material; (b) the occupants. (2.) Opening services.—(a) the roll unrolled by the ministers; the people standing; (b) adoration by the minister; the people responding with word of mouth, elevation of hands, and prostration of body. (3.) The main service.—(a) the Levites conduct it; (b) the people stand attentively; (c) the Scriptures are read distinctly, explained clearly, and understood intelligently. Vss. 4-8.

Verses 1.—All the people gathered, etc.—If this were to be taken literally, as mathematically exact, there would have been some 50,000 people, as that number had originally come up from captivity more than ninety years before (vii. 66-69; comp. Ez. ii. 64, 65.) But, of course, multitudes were not in the assembly. By vss. 2, 3 we are reminded that all the children, save the oldest ones, were absent. These absent children required adults to care for them. There were also the sick and their attendants. "As one man," denotes a common spirit and purpose, unanimity. Into the street that was before the water gate. The word here translated "street," means a broad place; in this passage an open area, or square. The "water gate" is mentioned only in Nehemiah; namely, in iii. 26; viii. 1, 3, 16; xii. 37. From the first of these passages, with which the others agree, it seems that the water gate was in the city wall, on the east of Ophel, which was the southern extrem-

ity of the temple mount, and directly south of the temple. They spake unto Ezra the scribe. There is no previous mention of Ezra in this book, which is thought to indicate that he had not been present during the restoration of the walls. It was eleven years before that his book represents him as being in Jerusalem, and he may have then returned to the king Artaxerxes, who only commissioned and sent him to make repairs on the temple, and have now opportunely arrived in time to lead in this solemn service. His commanding talent, his high character and office, his former service, and possibly his present arrival in some representative capacity from the king, naturally caused all to look to him as leader in, this religious act. To bring the book of the law of Moses, etc. The law proper was alone commanded, in a very true sense the five books were really the law, and "commanded" by the Lord.

Verses 2.—Brought the law.—Book and law are thus identified. All that could hear, etc. The children old enough to comprehend, distinguished thus as a third class from the "men and women." A good example for modern times. The first day of the seventh month. [Tisri, our September-October.] This was the great feast month, opening with the trumpet festival. Levit. xxiii. 23-25; Num. xxix. 1-6.

Verses 3.—He read therein.—This omits all reference to the part borne by Ezra's assistants (vss. 7, 8), and comprehends all in his action as leader. From the morning, etc. Marginal reading; more literally, "from the light"—a six hours' meeting. The ears of all the people were attentive unto the law. God's law. They trembled at his word, at him speaking—a sense, a deep and solemn sense of God, as present, as King, in all hearts, on all countenances. What fitness for an assembly of worshippers.

Verses 4.—Stood upon a pulpit of wood.—A wooden platform, raised so that all those on it could be seen and heard readily. The persons here named, so far as appears (xii. 7; x. 3, 7; iii. 23; 24), were priests, "probably the chief-priests of the course which was at the time performing the temple service." (Note the number—fourteen). This constant particularity in names and genealogies was due to the very structure and idea of the nation.

Verses 5.—Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, etc.—This was done with due and formal solemnity. The taking of the roll for the purpose of opening it was the signal for all to rise in token of reverent respect for the author of the roll, if they were before sitting. At any rate the "standing" is mentioned as the wonted posture of worshippers when the word of God was read.

Verses 6.—Ezra blessed the Lord [Jehovah] the great God.—Answering to our invocation. See the words of blessing or adoration used by David on a similar occasion in 1 Chron. xxix. 10-13. The same, or similar, were doubtless used by Ezra.

Verses 7.—And the Levites.—Not the persons named in the first part of the verse, and also the Levites, for those persons were Levites (ix. 4, 5; xii. 14; xii. 16); but the persons named, even the Levites. Caused the people to understand, etc. Drawn out into its particulars in the next verse.

Verses 8.—So they.—The Levites. Read . . . distinctly. With clear and distinct articulation and enunciation, and loud enough to be heard by the whole assembly. And gave the sense. Giving exposition or explanation of such passages as seemed to need it. And caused them to understand, etc. It may be translated, and they (the people) understood, etc. The two renderings, however, come to the same result. Then came obedience, for which they were ready. So may it be with us.—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, February 9th, 1879.—The Keeping of the Sabbath.—Nehemiah xiii. 15-22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy."—Ex. xx. 8.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Picture this wonderful Bible school. Ask what time their own Sunday-school opens; this one began at daylight! Who would like to come so early as that? Describe Ezra standing up high-

er than all the people, so that they could all see him, hold in his hand a roll which was their book. Next was the opening prayer; tell how all the people answered "Amen, amen," and of their reverent position.

Ezra reading from the platform, and as there were so many people that all could not hear him that other teachers standing in the midst of groups, or classes, explaining, repeating and enlarging so that all might hear and all might clearly understand. And all this for six hours! Tell when six hours from the time of opening your school would be, and ask if they would not get tired. Compare the privileges of the Sunday-school children to day with those of the Jews then.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 4.

- 1. Ruth.....Ruth i. 4; Matt. i. 5.
2. Ephraim.....Hosea ix. 16, 17.
3. Jashash.....2 Kings xiii. 14-19.
4. Othniel.....Judges iii. 9.
5. Ishmael.....Jer. xii. 1, 2.
6. Carmel.....1 Kings xviii. 42, 43.
7. Ezra.....Ezra vii. 6.
8. Ishbosheth.....2 Sam. i. v. 5, 7.
9. Nathan.....2 Sam. xii.
10. Tathnai.....Ezra v. 3.
11. Hazar.....Josh. xi. 10, 11.
12. Epenetus.....Rom. xvi. 5.
13. Levi.....Num. i. 47-54.
14. Obadiah.....Obadiah i.
15. Red Sea.....Exodus xiv. 27.
16. Demetrius.....3 John 12.
17. Ananias.....Acts ix. 10-19.
18. Lucius.....Rom. xvi. 21; Acts xiii. 1.
19. Whirlwind.....Jer. xxiii. 19; xxv. 32;
20. Ahab.....Jer. xxix. 21. [xxx. 23.
21. Yokes.....Jer. xxvii. 2, 3.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 5.

- 1. A sacred building to God's honour reared, In which his presence visibly appeared.
2. Who prophesied in King Josiah's reign, And from the Lord a respite did obtain?
3. Where did the Saviour two disciples meet, And there He held with them communion sweet?
4. What woman's heart was opened by the Lord Who succour to his servants did afford?
5. Who hid God's prophets from an ampieous king, And to their care did daily succour bring?
6. A name by prophets given to that land From whence God rescued Israel's chosen band.
7. Who in his trials did St. Paul forsake, And in this world his portion chose to take?
8. A sacred name which to our Lord was given To show that with us dwelt the God of heaven.
9. What ushered in the advent of our Lord— To those that sought Him guidance did afford?
10. The mount on which King Solomon did raise A fane in which the God of heaven to praise.
11. A term applied to our most gracious Lord To show how true and faithful is his word.
12. A patriarch from whom we all descend, And in his days men did in worship bend.
13. A chorister who lived in David's days, And sang to God in sweetest songs of praise.
14. Before the Flood there lived an holy seer Who told how Christ in glory should appear.
15. A feast which to the Jews did typify That Christ a sacrifice for sin should die.
16. From whom do Africa's swarthy sons descend, Whose wrongs we pray that God may shortly end?
17. What led the priests the Prince of Peace to slay, And peace destroys unto the present day.
18. What empire at our blessed Saviour's birth Bore iron sway o'er all the then known earth?
19. A faithful nurse, who loved her mistress well, And loved and honoured long with her did dwell.

If these initials side by side you place, A gracious title of our God you'll trace. Put thou thy trust in His almighty power, And He will guide thee through each trying hour. Trusting in Him, each anxious care should cease, And thou a foretaste gain of heavenly peace.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER V.—Alice Hammond's Request.

A few evenings later the talk of these three drifted into the same tender, touchstone channels, as is wont with those natures which are true to themselves—at least when the disguises which the world evokes are dropped and the sacred realm of home is uninvaded.

Hattie, with her firm health, clear head and judgment, and rare unselfishness, was the right hand of mother and sisters; and now, on the eve of marriage with a young minister, the hearts at the hearthstone melted and blended as one. Especially did Fleda cling to the strong, self-poised sister, and beautiful was the love between them.

"This is the night for a letter from Alice," said Hattie, rising from her knees, where she had been stroking the hair and temples of the sick sister, and singing, "Nearer, my God, to thee." Touching the bell-cord, she continued: "How different the tone of her letters since she became a Christian! The spirit of consecration in her last had thrilled me with longings after higher attainments ever since."

"Yes," said Fleda, "I used to weep over her letters, they were so trifling."

"And skeptical, too," added Hattie. "Mamma, Allie's conversion shamed my faith, or rather want of it. I used to feel that it was of no use to pray for her—that her case was too hard for the Lord; and now she has outstripped us all."

"Dear child!" murmured the mother; "she will be at home soon. Have you written her since your wedding-day was fixed?"

"Last week, mother; but here is John with the mail, and here is Allie's letter—and it is for you, mamma."

While the group are engaged with letters and papers, the reader wants an introduction to Alice Hammond. She is between her sisters in years, with a strange mixture of the nature of each, combined with some positively unique traits of her own. Fun-loving, audacious, and irreverent, she had been the object of great solicitude to her friends and admiration to the world. Possessed of brilliant talents and strong capabilities for good or ill, no Christian heart could know her and not desire to see these powers laid on the altar of youthful piety. But from earliest childhood she had evinced a positive aversion to religious things, averring that she "hated Sunday-school books because they were always about good children who died and went to heaven; good children were sure to die." As she grew in years her growth was rapid in frivolity and skepticism. Many were the tears shed over her by her devoted mother and sisters. The earnest prayers offered for her perhaps lacked that element which shall remove all obstacles. But He who "seeth not as man seeth" had rare purposes of grace for that wayward one, and in some pause of "giddy toil" touched her with his Spirit.

Early in life Alice Hammond had developed very rare musical taste and talent, which had been cultivated to an unusual degree in the best musical schools. For six years prior to her conversion, music had been an all-absorbing pursuit, amounting to a passion, to which everything was recklessly sacrificed. Speaking of this period, she says: "Music was, in reality, my god. For many years I resolutely shut my heart against the influences of God's Spirit, lest I should be called to give up my precious idol." Who that is familiar with the working of the human heart has not seen in others or felt within himself some pursuit, habit, study, or taste incompatible with his spiritual interests, even when perfectly harmless in itself or indulged in safely by others?

A star is sometimes hidden by a single thread stretched across the lens of a telescope. So are the mysteries of grace made impossible and hidden from the soul by some cherished idol. But the Master, looking upon this wanderer, "loved" her, and was about to make her a rich recipient of that love.

Dear Christian mother whose eyes may scan this page, have you one among your flock who has cost you countless

tears and anxious heart throbs? Limit not the power of that infinite One who loves your wandering child with a far deeper love than yours. Are not your tears and prayers hid in his censer? And they are not to return to you void.

If talents, and pleasures, and will hitherto used by Alice for her own advantage and selfish purposes, were not yielded without a struggle, they were none the less entirely consecrated at last. Friends and companions were alike amazed at God's work, many of the latter saying, "I should like to be a Christian too, if it would make me like Alice Hammond." The brilliant spirit which had hitherto given her popularity and admiration now made her a happy and useful Christian. They who are hid in the great heart of the infinite Saviour have the right above all others to be happy. Think of this, young pilgrim, and never dishonor the Master with a long face if you would have others believe yours to be a happy service.

From the outstart of Alice Hammond's Christian life she had set up a high standard and struggled to attain to it, and as the result her joyful and near communion with the Father of spirits was visible in her shining countenance. But not satisfied with the reception of such good herself, she daily asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" which question was about being answered in a most unexpected way, at least to those who loved her.

"Mamma," said Fleda as she lay watching the countenances of her mother and sister, "won't you read Allie's letter aloud? Is anything the matter?" Thus appealed to, Mrs. Hammond turned quickly around, and with a groan dropped her letter, saying, "Don't ask me; I cannot tell you."

At this Hattie sprang to her side, dropping a lapful of letters and papers, and seizing Allie's letter, glanced hastily down the page. Taking in its contents more rapidly than her mother had done, she threw herself down by Fleda, and with a shower of happy tears exclaimed: "Oh, Fleda, our prayer is answered; one of us is to be a missionary at last;" while with eager haste, for the moment unmindful of the stricken mother, she read as follows:

"DEAR MOTHER AND SISTERS: I have strange things to tell you, my dear ones, at which I believe you will rejoice. I have lived at least a month in the last ten days. But, first, I have a confession to make. You who have thought me so near the Saviour have been blind to the fact that I have been keeping back 'a part of the price,' that I was yet hugging my idol. I had not given all into the Master's hands. But at last Christ has come to my heart in a way he never did before, and enabled me to cast out now and for ever that which I had no right to cherish. In doing this he has filled me with a peace unlike earthly joys. I feel like a person who has been long insane, but is at last 'clothed and in his right mind.'"

"How can I praise God enough? Bless him for me, my dear ones. But this is not all. After Christ had hid me in the cleft of his side and taught me what it meant to 'abide' in him, there came another call. One of noble heart and presence who has spent ten years among the heathen, and buried the wife of his youth in the heart of the Pacific, asks your Alice to return with him on his heaven-sent errand.

"Mother, will you give one of your children to the glorious work of bringing the nations back to Christ? Will you send me, as you could not go yourself, to give the 'bread of life' to the perishing? God is calling me, mother. Every circumstance points the finger of Providence. Shall I not take up the work my father began and laid down so sadly? Have I your consent? You know, dear mother and sisters, that this is not a new subject to me. I have thought much of the missionary work before, and my heart burns with the desire of fulfilling our Master's command, 'Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.' Neither have I acted hastily in this matter, but have rather tried not to take one step until led by my Father. Oh, let me go, and give me strength by your blessing and cheer. I think I see glow in Fleda's eye, and hear her say, 'I am so glad;' but for mamma and Hattie I am not so sure. Let me hear from you soon; until then I shall hope and believe you will say, 'God speed you.'"

"Your affectionate daughter and sister, ALICE HAMMOND."

At the conclusion of this epistle, Mrs. Hammond raised her bowed head and looked at her daughters. Fleda's hands were clasped and her eyes closed, while her face was wreathed with smiles. Raising herself and stretching her hands towards her mother, she said, "Do you think papa can see and hear us?" "Why do you ask, daughter?"