

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, September 7th, 1879.—The Coming of the Lord.—1 Thess. iv. 13-18.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 13-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And so shall we ever be with the Lord."—1 Thess. iv. 17.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, 1 Thess. i. Tuesday, 1 Thess. ii. Wednesday, 1 Thess. iii. Thursday, 1 Thess. iv. Friday, 2 Thess. iii. Saturday, Matt. xxv. 31-46. Sunday, 1 Cor. xv. 12-28.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Doubt about the dead. Vs. 13. II. Doubt removed. Vs. 14. III. Special revelation. Vs. 15. IV. Second advent described. Vs. 6-8.

QUESTIONS.—By whom and when was the church at Thessalonica founded? From what city were the Epistles to this church written? With what prominent thought are they filled? How does the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians qualify the first?

I. Vs. 13.—With what fear were the Thessalonians troubled? What idea of a hereafter had the heathen?

II. Vs. 14.—By what is Paul assured of the resurrection of all of God's people, living or dead? 1 Cor. xv. 20-26.

III. Vs. 15.—What special revelation does Paul receive? Compare 1 Cor. xv. 51-53. What is meant by "shall not prevent?"

IV. Vs. 16-18.—Describe the second-advent scene? Why is there a fitness in the dead in Christ being raised first?

THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS.—The founding of the Church by Paul at Thessalonica is related in Acts xvii. 1-9. Thence the Apostle went to Berea; thence to Athens and to Corinth, where he remained a year and a half, in which time he wrote two Epistles to the Thessalonians, the earliest, in fact, which we have in the New Testament. They are eminently moral and practical in their teaching, while the latest Epistles are more truly of a doctrinal and spiritual character. Allusions to the second coming of the Lord are more frequent in them than in the later Epistles, when the writer, as some suppose, was possibly more familiar with the truth of Christ. John xvi. 13. In the First Epistle, Paul deeply impressed the royal state of Christ's second advent on the minds of the Thessalonian converts. In the Second, he took occasion to correct impressions that it was immediately at hand, for the time of our Lord's coming is hidden from all created beings. Far away, as the second advent yet may be, let us believe in it, for it is always near.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 13.—But I would not, etc.—The better reading is, "we would not," etc.—the Apostle, as often, speaking both for himself and his fellow-teachers. i. 1. This section was evidently occasioned by Timothy's report to Paul (iii. 5-7) of the distress of the Thessalonian Christians as to their deceased friends. Deceased Christians are spoken of as sleeping, not to suggest that they are without consciousness, nor from the resemblance of death to sleep, but as indicating the end of the toil and strife of life's day, and the rest which follows in Christ. That ye sorrow not, etc. The sadness, or sorrow, was partly the feeling that the Christians who had died were to lose the promised inheritance, and to be lost to their surviving friends. Their gross ignorance as to Christ's coming, is not to be charged to the Apostle, or to apostolic teaching. "Others," or more exactly "the rest," are the unconverted heathen. The hope which these had not, was, in general, the Christian hope, but in particular, the hope of the resurrection.

Verse 14.—For if we believe, etc.—The first points of gospel teaching were, the death and the resurrection of Christ, to atone for sin and to bring in salvation. Those two facts Paul calls them to note, and to see how they implied the doctrine of the resurrection of the saints, and so the comfort for their sorrow. Them which sleep in Jesus. Or rather, "those that sleep by Jesus," that is, whom Jesus called to himself, whose death is thus presented as the release given to his disciples by the Lord who assigned their work and its limit, and not the result of chance, fate, or Satan's agency. Will God bring with him. Christ's second coming is fitly called God's coming, not simply because Christ is

divine, but because in this, as in all things, he does the Father's will and reveals the Father.

Verse 15.—For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord. "This," viz., what follows in the remaining part of our lesson. Emphasis is laid upon the fact that Paul speaks by revelation, in "the word of the Lord," not because his teaching elsewhere was not of divine authority, but because the Thessalonians had need to take special note that this was Christ's own word as to his own future work, and so to take to themselves the prophecy as Christ's, and thus rest. We which are alive and remain, etc. Some have wrongly inferred from these words, that Paul expected to be alive at Christ's second coming. There is not a little evidence for the view, more, I think, than for either of the two preceding, that Paul had definite expectations that neither he nor any of his time would live to see the second coming of Christ, and that he speaks of two classes to exist at the time of the advent—the dead saints and the living saints—and classes himself with the living, because, in fact, he was living when speaking. The two classes of whom he wrote, were to be the two classes at the last, and so he presents them. See 2 Thess. and Rom. xi. Shall not prevent them which are asleep. To "prevent" here means to precede, and so have some advantage over—to share the glories of the heavenly kingdom, before or without the others.

Verse 16.—For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven.—The word "himself" is emphatic—the very Lord Jesus Christ, who was born at Bethlehem, reared at Nazareth, crucified at Jerusalem, rose from the grave and ascended into heaven from Olivet—he, and not another, he, the centre of faith, hope, and undying, clinging, longing love should, shall descend. See Acts i. 11, where the same emphasis is laid on the same thought. Precious thought, precious emphasis. As to the question "Where is heaven?" which the skeptic ignorantly supposes is made difficult for the Christian by astronomy, no sensible Christian will allow it for an hour to puzzle him. Can we leave nothing to God? Must one answer every conceivable quibble, before he takes and trusts God's Word? With a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump [trumpet] of God. The word translated "shout" designates rather the idea of command spoken by a leader to his forces. Here this idea of regal authority is prominent. Whether it is the word of Christ or of the archangel that is meant, is not certain. Matt. xxiv. 31; xxv. 31. 2 Thess. i. 7. That they are organized into an harmonious body with a head, is in harmony with Col. i. 16, and with common sense. By "the trumpet of God," the representation of a royal, universal, public, summoning and marshaling of earth's millions, living and dead, is kept up. 1 Cor. xv. 52. Compare Ex. xxi. 16; Ps. xlvii. 5; Rev. xv. 2; and also Num. x. 2; xxxi. 6; Joel ii. 1. And the dead in Christ shall rise first. Mark how those that were "asleep by Christ" (vs. 14) are here called "the dead in Christ"—called "dead," because here the thought is both of contrast with the living and of bodily resurrection, and said to be "in Christ" to distinguish them from those who die without Christ and out of him. There is no reference here to a first and second resurrection, but to a resurrection of deceased saints before a "change" and ascent of the living. 1 Cor. xv. 51, 52.

Verse 17.—Then we, etc.—See above on vs. 15. Paul does not speak of the change or transformation of the living, which is to precede or accompany the rapture unto Christ. He is more brief than in 1 Cor. Of the clouds in which the ascent shall be made, see Acts i. 9; 2 Sam. xxii. 12; Ps. civ. 3; Dan. vii. 13; Matt. xxiv. 30; Rev. i. 7. The idea of glorious divine majesty, of royal final triumph is conveyed. This ascent to meet the Lord, indicates the out-going and up-going of welcoming friends. And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Paul does not here say where, far less does he say it shall be in the air. This being with Christ in his glory, and glorified in the likeness of his glory, is the very marrow of the promise. Questions of time, place, manner, vanish in the presence of this sublime assurance.

Verse 18.—Wherefore comfort, etc.—So let us—"with these words," the very

words of our Lord as given to Paul, and by him to us.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, September 14th, 1879.—The Christian in the world.—1 Timothy vi. 6-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."—John xvii. 16.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Explain some ways in which death is like sleep; we do not know anything that is going on; do not think or talk; expect to get up in the morning better for the sleep. Children who love Jesus need be no more afraid to lie down to die, than to lie down to sleep.

When our friends who have served Jesus die, we are very sorry to do without their company, but the hope that by-and-by they will wake up well and strong, with bodies that are never sick and tired, keeps us from grieving too much, and comforts us.

The angels, Acts i. 11, did not say when Jesus would come? No man knoweth the day nor the hour, not even the angels. But he has appointed a day. Every one will not be dead; some will remain alive; but these will not see him first, for Jesus loves his friends who have died, and wants them to be all ready to see him at the same time, so that it will make no difference whether we are dead or alive when Jesus comes. He will send an angel before him, just as a king sometimes sends a herald or messenger to call the people together to whom he will speak. This angel will descend to the earth with a shout! Then he will sound a trumpet, and at the very first blast, every dead man, woman, and child, will hear. The ground will shake, and whether they have been dead a day or for thousands of years, whether they have been buried in a cemetery, or drowned in the deep sea, all will come out. All Jesus' friends, those just from their graves, and those still alive, will be changed, quick as you can wink. They will be caught up together in the air! There they will meet Jesus, coming to meet them in the clouds of heaven. All the holy angels, and all the redeemed spirits of heaven will be with him. What a sight it will be!

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 35.

PATIENCE.—Rev. ii. 19; Heb. xii. 1.

- 1. P riscilla...Rom. xvi. 3-5.
2. A donjah...2 Sam. iii. 4; 1 Kings i. 25.
3. T hyatira...Acts xvi. 14.
4. I saiah; so called because he predicts the Messiah more fully and clearly than any other prophet. Isaiah 53.
5. E lam...Gen. x. 22; Isa. xxi. 2.
6. N aboth...1 Kings xxi. 2, 3; Num. xxxvi. 7.
7. C enchrea...Rom. xvi. 1.
8. E lymas the Sorcerer...Acts xiii. 8.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 36.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

"Asked" of the Lord, in humble prayer; In sorrowful petition sought; "Lent" to the Lord (O blessed thought!) To serve Him in his temple fair.

To her, who in deep sorrow prayed, Blameless, in that her spirit still Resigned itself to bear His will, God hath the loan full well repaid.

- 1. Whither did she each year repair? And where, with gift of corn and wine, Did she to God her son resign, As filled with joy she left him there?
2. Here, where the treasure long had lain, A roll was found; and written there; "Rebuild in peace the house of prayer; In beauty bid it rise again."
3. Two masters man can never serve, To please them both he tries in vain, Away with this—Christ's word is plain, Nor ever from God's service swerve.
4. See yonder group so weird and pale; They may not venture to draw nigh, But, with uplifted voice, must cry The short, sad word that tells their tale.
5. Wife of the first High Priest, ordained To minister before the Lord, To utter forth His awful word; As spokesman and as mouth retained.
6. "Now, to my wounding, I have slain A man—and to my hurt—a youth." So owned he the eternal truth That crime brings grief and lasting stain.

Youths' Department.

From Sunday Afternoon. Cris-Cross.

(Continued.)

Now Lydia Crane was not naturally inclined to be querulous or selfish; she had been duly converted in the progress of a revival in Lyndon, and joined the church during Parson Beach's life-time. She read her Bible daily; said her prayers—I use the phrase advisedly—and was a punctual attendant on all the means of grace. She was the head and front of the church sewing-society, and secretary of the Foreign Mission Circle, yet in the living of her life she had become, at the age of thirty-five, fretful, self-centred, opinionated, and domineering; but perfectly certain that she was an exemplary Christian. Charity, sympathy, tenderness, do not grow in such a solitude as hers; it is not good for man or woman to be alone; and if to be a Christian is to wear the image of Christ, as the gospel seems to imply, there was very little obvious likeness in Miss Lydia to the Master whose name she wore.

Yet she was a thoroughly honest woman, anxious above all things to do right; ready to give to every "object" that impelled the long-handled contribution boxes, with deacons at the other end, through every slip on every other Sunday, though she had not even a kind word for the beggar at her door; for begging implied "shiftlessness" and that was unpardonable.

But just before Mr. Sylvester was settled in Lyndon—Miss Lydia received a letter from her niece that amazed and disgusted her. It ran thus wise:

"Dear Aunt: "If you see me some of these days walk in at your door, don't you be surprised. If pa don't stop I shall run away. I certainly shall, and I have n't got anywhere else to go. You see I want to marry Alf. Peck, just the nicest fellow you ever saw. I don't care if he is poor, he's awfully smart; but pa has got a kind of a prejudice against him; he won't let me see him, if he can help it; but you better believe he can't lock me up if he tries! So anyway, if he gets too mighty I'm going to run for it, and I know you're real good, everybody says so. Just write a line to say you've got this and direct it to Alf. Peck for me. Don't for anything let pa know, but I don't believe you will. Good bye. "Your affectionate niece, "MARIETTE."

The impudence of the thing took away Miss Lydia's breath. She gave shelter to a runaway girl! the idea was monstrous. She had a great mind to inclose the letter directly to her brother; but the bell rang for preparatory lecture just then, so she tied on her bonnet and went to church, and after she had slept that night on the matter, she resolved to delay any action at present. A dim sort of sympathy made her unwilling to betray Mariette to her father; an esprit du corps that she would not have acknowledged to herself, for Lydia never had a real lover: two or three elderly widowers had made prudent advances to her in vain; but no tender sentiment had ever stirred her chilly heart. Yet after all she was a woman, and shrank from violating this girl's confidence, however she disapproved of it. Several weeks passed and her fears vanished; she took no notice of the letter, determined neither to "make nor meddle" in the matter. In the meantime Mr. Sylvester had been ordained to the church, moved his family into the parsonage, and commenced a round of pastoral visits. It was one of the loveliest of all June afternoons that he stood at Miss Lydia's door knocking for admittance. The white roses that clambered up to the chamber windows were thick set with bloom in every stage of beauty, from the swelling bud folded in green wrappings to the full-blown trembling blossom in whose glowing heart a dew drop quivered; sure token that the night-wind had parted those pure leaves and dropped a tear of foreboding over their certain fading. Beds of pinks scented the fresh air with spice, and the early cinnamon roses were dull with half-finished and half-dead flowers, sending a sickly oriental odor of attar across the perfume and honey that freighted every breeze.

Miss Lydia herself came to the door: her usually calm and rigid face was

flushed with some trouble evidently, and in her hand she held the yellow cover of a telegram; but she was glad to see Mr. Sylvester; he was the minister, and the new minister; it was a duty to be glad to see him. As he seated himself in the prim, cold parlor, he opened the conversation with a remark on the weather, that sure and safe first step.

"Yes, it's good weather," allowed Miss Lydia. "We generally do have the best of weather in June. I wish't sometimes 't would last right along through the year."

"Perhaps we should not enjoy it as much if we had it all the time," quietly answered the minister.

"Mebbe not; but I can't say I like cold weather; it makes such a sight of dirty work. Wood is trying enough; always droppin' everywhere specks and slivers; but coal—coal is a heap worse." Mr. Sylvester smiled. "But June is dusty."

"Yes; there's trouble everywhere. Seems sometimes as though you couldn't pass a day without it."

"Yet one would think, Miss Crane, that you had very little; you have a lovely home here, and no family cares or sorrows."

"Well everybody has their own troubles,"—her mind reverted here to the list we have already chronicled, and she felt rather unwilling to confide them to the minister, so she wound up with a glittering generality. "I have mine as well as other folks; there's a good many days when everything under the canopy seems to go cris-cross with me."

"Then you ought to be blessed indeed," gravely answered Mr. Sylvester.

Miss Lydia stared, but he went on: "I mean if you fully entertain the meaning of that word; it is only a contraction of 'Christ's cross.' Surely if you bear His cross daily, you are an unusually privileged woman."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered, with rude honesty.

"You are a Christian, Miss Lydia?"

"Well I should hope so! I've been a professor near about twenty years."

"But I mean a Christian," insisted Mr. Sylvester.

Miss Lydia darted a keen glance at him, but it sank before the clear, cool, penetrating look of his gray eyes. She moved uneasily on her chair.

"Why, I suppose I am. I mean to be."

"Then if things go with you according to Christ's cross every day, it is well with you, certainly."

"I didn't know as anybody liked crosses."

"No; but there is a wide difference between the cross we carry for ourselves and that we bear for Christ; there was Simon of Cyrene, you know; 'him they compelled to bear the cross.' It was harder for him, no doubt, than it would have been for John, who loved the Master, and would have rejoiced to save Him from even that burden."

Miss Lydia's face grew interested; intelligence and honesty quickened its worn lines; she did not understand, but she began to suspect there was something in the gospel she had never understood, and desired to know now.

"I don't believe I sense you yet," she said, more gently.

"It is very simple, my friend, if you look at it; it is merely taking Christ's cross instead of our own; that is, taking the troubles He sends and bearing them as He bore his own, because we want to be like him. Cris-cross ought to be the great blessing of our daily life."

"I don't know as I ever,—well, yes; I do know I never thought on't in that light before," said Miss Lydia gravely; and I don't think I know now just exactly how to work it."

"I can tell you how I have tried," answered Mr. Sylvester; "and it has been a mighty help to me. Take the Bible and study the gospels; read them over and over. You know already what Christ endured; hunger, cold, thirst, temptation, the loss and the desertion of friends; can you find one place where he fretted or complained over these troubles? He does not even allude to his crucifixion as a thing terrible to himself. He did not go about telling all men how dreadful his sufferings were and would be; what little we know of them is recorded for our benefit only, for our instruction in the way of life. Did you ever think, Miss Lydia, why Christ chose to be poor and lonely, when he might just as well have been a temporal king and still under-gone death for us?"

"Well, I never did. I never thought on't much. I read the Bible, too, considerable; but seems to me somehow as if it wasn't like other reading."