

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, January 19th, 1879.—The Mission of Nehemiah.—Neh. ii. 1-8.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 4-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"The God of heaven, he will prosper us; therefore we his servants will arise and build."—Neh. ii. 20.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Nehemiah i. ii. 1-8. Tuesday, Lamentations ii. Wednesday, Vs. 2; Ecclesiastes iii. 1-15. Thursday, Vs. 3; Romans x. Friday, Vs. 4; Matthew vi. 5-15. Saturday, Vs. 8; Genesis xxxii. 24-32. Sunday, Vs. 3; Psalm cxxxviii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. The sad cup-bearer. Vs. 1. II. Royal sympathy enlisted. Vs. 2-4. III. Nehemiah's wish expressed. Vs. 5. IV. Plans approved. Vs. 6. V. Official letters given. Vs. 7, 8.

QUESTIONS.—What was the theme of the last lesson? The date? How many years have passed since then? What trials have the Jews since had? What work remains undone? Who is to do it? Where did he then go?

I. Vs. 1.—What was the reason of Nehemiah's sadness? Chap. i. 1-3. What was his office to the king? Chap. i. 11. Had Nehemiah observed the custom?

II. Vs. 2, 4.—What question does the king now ask? What is Nehemiah's answer? Nehemiah says, "So I prayed." How did he pray? How should we all pray? 1 Thess. v. 17.

III. Vs. 5.—What was Nehemiah's wish?

IV. Vs. 6.—What shows the value of Nehemiah's service to the king? What is meant by "I set him a time"? Who seconded the king's approval?

V. Vs. 7, 8.—What further aid did Nehemiah seek? For what three uses did he request a tribute from the forests of Lebanon? To what did he credit all his royal favor?

Read at close of school Ps. cxxxviii.

Between the last and the present lesson a period of seventy years has passed (b. c. 515-445)—years of great affliction and reproach to the returned captives. The walls of the holy city were still broken down and the gates were in ruins, as the Chaldeans left them nearly a hundred and fifty years before. To be sure, the temple was rebuilt, the government was partially settled, and the reformation under Ezra was under some headway, but the condition of the people was sorrowful and the city was without a fortifying wall. This was the one great work left undone. The genealogy of Nehemiah is unknown further than the chapter i. 1, and vii. 2 of the book informs us.

EXPOSITION.—The Scripture of this lesson is a dialogue between the Persian king and Nehemiah, one of his butlers, with the necessary explanatory notes. The king asks questions, and Nehemiah answers. The scene is at a royal banquet at the king's palace, in Shushan, the queen at his side.

Introduction.—The situation explained.

Artaxerxes—Asks for the cause of Nehemiah's sadness.

Nehemiah—Answers courteously that it is Jerusalem's desolation.

Artaxerxes—Asks what Nehemiah desires.

Nehemiah—Answers, leave of absence to build Jerusalem.

Artaxerxes—Asks for Nehemiah's chosen time and terms of absence.

Nehemiah—Answers and adds a request for an escort and material for building.

The requests are granted.

Vers. 1.—In the month Nisan.—Before the captivity called Abib, the first of the Jewish sacred year, our March-April. Twentieth year of Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes Longimanus, the son Xerxes, reigned b. c. 464-425, or forty years. Hence the events of our lesson fall at just the middle of his reign. Wine was before him. The wine only is mentioned, not because there was not also food, etc., but because it was only the wine with which, as butler, Nehemiah had to do. Now I had not been beforetime sad in his presence. Was not usually. Nehemiah supposed he had disguised his sorrow; but in this he had failed, and the king saw his failure.

Vers. 2.—Why is thy countenance? etc.—It had now been four months since the report of Jerusalem's miserable plight had been made to Nehemiah

(i. 2), and it had doubtless been a source of constant secret sorrow and distress. It was not his purpose to break it at this feast. It was a delicate, perhaps dangerous request, to make at any time, as Eastern sovereigns did not readily brook anything that could be construed as a slight, or lack of appreciation, and clearly such a request was quite liable to such construction. This also was in part a cause of Nehemiah's fear at the sovereign's question.

Vers. 3.—Let the king live for ever.—This salutation expressing loyalty would have been needless but for the nature of the subject. He forestalls and averts suspicion by this avowal of loyalty, and then states the fact that his heart is far away beyond the Euphrates and beyond the Jordan. The city, the place of my father's sepulchres lieth waste. This may imply that Nehemiah belonged to the tribe of Judah. Comp. i. 2; vii. 2. The reference to the graves of his ancestors is doubtless made with wise reference to a kindred sentiment in the king's heart, by which favor through sympathy would be conciliated. The gates, etc. See i. 3. It had been seventy years since the dedication of the Temple of which our last lesson treated, and the hostility of the neighboring peoples, and the fewness of the Israelites, with their ruinous tendency to forget God and his commandments, are enough to explain the waste.

Vers. 4.—For what dost thou make request.—Evidently the fact and manner of this question revealed the sovereign's friendly disposition, and so encouraged and reassured the butler. So I prayed to the God of heaven. Silently turned his heart consciously to the God whose he was and whom he served for wisdom to answer the king, and for God's influence upon the king's heart to incline him to receive with favor his answer. A good example.

Vers. 5.—If it pleases the king.—Courteous and appropriate. Found favor in thy sight. Not in general, but in this matter of his sadness and its cause. Unto Judah, etc. See on vs. 3. The king, fourteen years before, had shown a great favor to Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra vii. 11-26), and hence knew enough of Nehemiah's people and city to understand the request, and was prepared to enter into the project.

Vers. 6.—The queen also sitting by him.—Mentioned either because she took part in the conversation as being interested in Nehemiah, and his people, and project (See the Book of Esther), or because it was an unusual, though not wholly unknown event for an Eastern queen to be thus at a banquet with the king. For how long, etc. Indicating willingness to allow a temporary, but not permanent and final absence. And I set him a time. From v. 14 it appears that he was in Jerusalem twelve years. Whether he set this time at this feast does not appear.

Vers. 7.—Let letters be given, etc.—He can now ask with confidence for that which will secure the success of his enterprise, because by the king's ready consent it had become virtually the king's business. The river referred to is thought to be the Euphrates, and the escort was desired for safety because, unlike Ezra, who had been sent eleven years before (Ezra viii), he was unattended by returning Israelites. The "governors" were men holding office under the Persian monarch, and governing a limited region.

Vers. 8.—The king's forest.—The word for the forest is in its English form, paradise, and is also found in Eccl. ii. 5, and Cant. iv. 13. The Greek form of the word occurs in Luke xxiii. 43; 2 Cor. xii. 4; Rev. ii. 7. It signified an enclosed park or pleasure ground, usually in the vicinity of the palace. The "paradise," kept by Asaph seems to have been near Jerusalem, and has been thought to be "the earlier gardens of king Solomon." The palace which appertained to the house. The word translated palace has as its first meaning a fortress or tower, and should be so rendered here. The house here meant is the temple. The tower or fortress in connection with it as rebuilt by Herod, was called Antonia. In Antonia were stationed Roman soldiers to keep the peace at festivals. See Acts xxi. 31-40; xxii, xxiii. The house that I shall enter into. Nehemiah went as a "governor" of Judah, and was to have a house corresponding to his office. The king granted me according, etc. This re-

cognizes the king's decision as of God's ordination and determination.

We must often do duty at the sacrifice of feeling.

We often are in great fear, when under God's care we are quite safe. God helps us to help him.

Trust in God does not make one reckless of means.

"The good hand of God" should be seen and owned by his servants.

SUNDAY, January 26th, 1879.—The Building Interrupted.—Nehemiah iv. 7-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them."—Nehemiah iv. 9.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Describe Nehemiah's life in the king's palace, rich and honored, yet his heart turned to the country of his fathers, which he had never seen. Picture the visit of his countrymen and Nehemiah's eager questions about the state of affairs at Jerusalem, and his sorrow.

He told the King of kings all about it. But the great God has so much to attend to, would he pay attention to what one man would ask him? See what the children think about that. Ask whether any thing has ever worried them? Have they told the Lord about it? Has he helped them? How do they think he will help Nehemiah?

Teach how he answered Nehemiah's prayer, by making him feel that he must speak to the king about his country. Show the difficulties in the way.

Describe Nehemiah coming before the king, washing the golden cup in his presence, then pouring a little wine into his left hand, and drinking it before he handed the full cup to the king. Suddenly he was startled by hearing Artaxerxes ask, "Why are you so sad?" These words seem natural enough to us, but Nehemiah was afraid, for they might cost him his life, for kings like people to act as if it made them perfectly happy only to be near them. But he answered boldly, and the king was touched by his love for his country, and asked what he wished him to do. Then Nehemiah prayed to the God of heaven. Ask what he prayed for, and how. It was a quick, silent prayer. No one heard it but God.

Tell of the bold and large requests which Nehemiah made, and how the king kindly granted them all; and whom Nehemiah praised for all these things.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

- No. 2. 1. Gladness Psa. xvii. 11. 2. O badiah h 1 Kings xviii. 3. 3. A nis e Matt. xxiii. 23. 4. T yr e Matt. xi. 21. 5. S hi p Matt. xiv. 22.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 3. A poor man and a rich man here are seen;

The poorer is the richer man I ween.

1. One of seven, not last in act and deed The poor to succour in their hour of need.

2. He was once King of Judah, good and great, But by presumption fell from high estate.

3. Here the good seed into good ground was cast, It quick took root, and ripened fast.

4. Seen in a vision on a lonely spot, A promise given too, and ne'er forgot.

5. A name of tenderness, a loving word, By which Jerusalem addressed her Lord.

6. At Antioch first was uttered this sweet word, By which men meant "the followers of their Lord."

7. Who this hath found is happy quite, And ne'er again will trust to his own might.

8. A river of historic fame, Where worshippers together came.

"Do you make any reduction to a minister?" said a young lady in Richmond, the other day, to a salesman. "Always. Are you a minister's wife?" "Oh, no; I'm not married," said the lady, blushing. "Daughter, then?" "No." The tradesman looked puzzled. "I am engaged to a theological student," she said. The reduction was made.

As the heart is, so is love to the heart. It partakes of its strength or weakness, its health or disease.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER III.—Mrs. Hammond's Removal.

In one of the quiet streets of New Haven stands an old house, somewhat stained and weather-beaten, which has escaped the pruning and redressing of its more pretentious neighbors. This was once the home of so pure a saint that we are fain to think by some sweet leave of heaven she was an angel in disguise.

It is a small but cheerful sitting-room into which we will invite the reader. A few healthy plants stand in the south window, a well-filled bookcase in the corner of the room, and a lady's escriptor and harpsichord of such quaint and rare design that they tell of other climes. The handsome carpet, too, so rare in those days, suggests taste and affluence; but the owner is rich only in faith and charity. The usual wood-fires there also, lending its cheerful blaze to illuminate every dark object. But the eye is irresistibly drawn to the centre of the room, with her feet in the lap of a golden-haired grandchild, who is alternating her caresses between these and a large black cat sitting on the rug beside her. By the side of the chair stands a small lamp-stand, and on it lies an open book—the Book from which this lovely woman has drawn "bread" when hungry; "water" when thirsty; and "wine" and "milk" and "honey" when faint and sick; "oil" wherewith to bind the broken heart; "light" when she was in doubt; "strength" to prop her weakness; and prowess by which she was "able to quench all the fiery darts of the devil."

A halo of heaven's own peace sits upon the brow and smiles upon the finely-cut lips, and the dark hazel eye has a diamond's light in it. I am sure, reader, if you had ever seen that eye, you would know her by it in heaven. Three babes, and two noble sons in manhood's prime, lie out beneath the churchyard trees, and long years ago they laid her beautiful staff to sleep beside them. Reverses of fortune—bringing poverty, toil, hardship even—disease might have dimmed the lustre of the eye, and covered the dead with frost; but anchored upon a rock, her firm outlook tells of undisturbed peace; and to-night, as you gaze into the serene face on this her seventieth birthday, and note the few silver threads through the dark hair, you are fain to say, "All is well!"

This is the home and mother that Edward Hammond sought in his perplexity and trouble. He is not expected; but the golden-haired child looks up at the sound of a footstep upon the walk, saying: "Grandma, I wish Uncle Edward would come and celebrate your birthday." The words are scarcely said when the door opens, and a young man with earnest brow and dark eyes, so like and yet unlike the aged saint, was on his knees beside the mother, and caressing her with such tender reverence as sons feel alone for mothers. "You did not expect me, and I am late to greet and congratulate you; but, mother, I should not have been here had I not been in trouble."

"In trouble, Edward? If that be so, then you have a far better refuge than this, even 'a very present help,' my son."

"Yes, mother, but I need you to help me to lay hold of it."

"Bless you, my dear boy!" smiling and passing her hand caressingly over brow and hair. "You are your father's picture, and, I believe, have his heart. How privileged I am to give such a son to the Master's work among such of the heathen!"

A smile of pain and bitterness crossed the face of the son at thought of the contrast between her views of parental love and privilege and those entertained by the parents of Mary. Rising hastily, he placed himself in a chair before his mother and unburdened his full heart, and the mother listened and pondered.

"What can I do, mother?" at last he asked in a tone of mingled perplexity and distress. "Can I go without Mary? What is duty? Is it right to leave her, or take her notwithstanding their opposition?"

"Edward," said Mrs. Hammond, "you have given yourself unreservedly to God and his cause. He has made you willing to leave all for him. I have given you gladly to this work, and now he has hedged your path. You ask 'wherefore?' and I cannot tell. Darkness and mystery are oftentimes the garments with which he covers himself. Perhaps 'Father' desired merely to try and to prove you, and finds that it will be more of a discipline for you to stay than to go. This much we know: all is in wisdom and love; and God, sometimes needs to show us that his work will get on without us, lest we feel of too much importance. Duties never clash; it would be clearly inconsistent to take Mary against her parents' positive commands, and even worse to forsake her when you are pledged to her and she is willing to leave all for you. No, my son, your way is hedged; but leave all in quiet assurance with him who says, 'What thou knowest not now thou shalt know hereafter.'"

"But, mother, can it be that God has led me to this that I should draw back now? There are few to work for God in India, and I thought God wanted me. Can it be?"

"My dear Edward, I just reminded you that perhaps this was the very lesson you needed, lest you attach too much importance to your own labors. Can you not trust 'Father'?"

"Father has done it," "I will go and ask Father," and like utterances, were the usual form by which Mrs. Hammond expressed the childlike and confidential relations between the soul and God. Ah, what nearness and sweetness and security does such a personal application of the fatherhood of God convey to the human heart!

"I cannot understand it, mother," continued Mr. Hammond after a pause and a deep sigh; "and in thus deciding it seems to me almost that I must do violence to my own conscience."

But so it was decided, and what the great day of secrets will reveal of purposes crossed, schemes of usefulness blighted, and fair fields of fruitage left ungathered none can tell now. That day will declare it. Mrs. Hammond passed away to her beautiful rest on that very night after saying to her son, "I will go and talk to Father about it; leave all with him, and under some one of the fair trees of life up yonder we will find the sunshine of heaven lighting up this mystery. Be of good cheer, Edward."

From the spot where Edward Hammond last kissed his mother the angels carried her without one struggle, leaving a smile of peace and love upon the parted lips for the sorrowing one below; and thus they found her, with clasped hands and slightly bowed head, "talking with Father."

The Wine-glass.

Who hath wee? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine! They that go to seek mixed wine! Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, When it giveth its colour in the cup; when it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.

Six Bible Names.

Say them over a good many times, until you can remember them, and the order in which they are given. Adam, Enoch, Abraham, Solomon, Christ, John. Repeat them again, and then learn the following bit of Bible Chronology:—

- 1. From the time Adam was created until the time Enoch was translated was a thousand years. 2. From the time Enoch was translated until the time Abraham was born was a thousand years. 3. From the time Abraham was born until the time Solomon dedicated the temple was a thousand years. 4. From the time Solomon dedicated the temple until the time Christ was born was a thousand years. 5. From the time Christ was born until the time John died was a hundred years. Thus the Bible history of forty-one hundred years is divided.—Kind Words.