

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, February 9th, 1879.—The Keeping of the Sabbath.—Nehemiah xiii. 15-22. B. C. 423.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 19-22.

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

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Neh. xiii. Tuesday, Gen. ii. Wednesday, Ex. xvi. 4-31. Thursday, Deut. v. Friday, Matt. xii. 1-13. Saturday, John xx. Sunday, Acts. xx. 7-12.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Sabbath desecration. Vss. 15, 16. II. Remonstrances. Vss. 17, 18. III. Prohibition. Vss. 19-21. IV. Enforcement. Vs. 22.

QUESTIONS.—When did Nehemiah go back to Babylon? When did he return to Jerusalem? Why? How old is the Sabbath as a Divine institution? What evidence have we of its observance between the Creation and the Exodus? What was the first reason of its appointment? What reason does Moses add to this? Why was its observance enjoined in harvest time? Why is the first, or the Lord's Day, now observed instead of the seventh or the Sabbath?

I. Vss. 15, 16.—What profanation had Nehemiah seen? What pledge was thereby broken? Neh. x. 31. What great Mosaic law? Who tempted the Jews to this desecration?

II. Vss. 17, 18.—What was Nehemiah's first course with these Sabbath-breakers?

III. Vss. 19-21.—When do men need to be coerced?

IV. Vs. 22.—Whom does Nehemiah place on guard at the gates? Why?

TALK ABOUT.—The permanence of the Sabbath as an institution.—The blessing of the Sabbath as a civilizing force. The work that may be done lawfully on the Sabbath. Matt. xii. 11, 12.

Having been absent twelve years (compare ii. 1, with xiii. 6: B. C. 445-433), and accomplished what he undertook, Nehemiah returned to Babylon; but after some time, possibly ten years, he had permission to re-visit Jerusalem (B. C. 423) in order to reform serious abuses that had grown up in his absence, and particularly the desecration of the Sabbath. He told the people emphatically, that this was a sin that brought God's wrath upon their fathers. On his first visit to Jerusalem we saw him on his horse at midnight among the ruins, treading out spiritual profanity. The Midnight Rider was grand; the Sabbath Gate-Shutter was grander.

EXPOSITION.—The narrative assigned as the Scripture of the present lesson sets before us, (1) the profanation of the Sabbath; (2) Nehemiah's protest against it; and (3) the means by which he stopped it.

I. SABBATH BREAKING.—(1) By the Jews alone. (2) By the Jews under lead of the Tyrians. Vss. 15, 16.

II. THE PROTEST.—(1) The nature of the act. (2) The judgment suffered for such acts of the fathers. Vss. 17, 18.

III. THE REMEDY.—(1) Closing the city gates during the Sabbath. (2) Prohibiting the enactment of traders near the city wall on the Sabbath. (3) Permanent appointment of Levites to guard the gates. Vss. 19-22.

As to the fundamental law of the Sabbath, see Ex. xx. 8-11; xxxi. 12-17; Lev. xxiii. 3; Deut. v. 12-15. The account in Exodus xvi. 22-30 sets forth its restoration, rather than its institution, among the Israelites. Its historical reference is given, as both to God's rest from the works of creation, and apparently to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Deut. v. 15. It was indissolubly linked with the whole Hebrew system of festivals, their very foundation. Indeed, the word is understood to designate those festivals as a whole in Lev. xix. 3, 30.

Verse 15.—In those days.—verses 6, 7, the time which followed his return from the king to whom he had gone after acting twelve years as governor in Jerusalem. v. 14. The statement in verse 6 is understood to make his absence one year, "days" being elsewhere used of the year. Ex. xiii. 10; Lev. xxv. xxv. 29. In Judah. In the country of Judah, away from the city. Treading wine-presses. "The wine-presses of the Jews consisted of two receptacles, or vats, placed at different elevations, in the upper one of which the grapes were trodden, while the lower one received

the expressed juices." Joel iii. 13.—Bringing in sheaves. These were sometimes brought in a cart, "a clumsy affair with wheels of solid wood, and drawn by oxen." "At present, beasts of burden are used for this purpose. The camel is made to lie down by the heaps, called 'shocks' in the Bible, and the sheaves are piled all over him. . . . It is a strange and amusing sight to look at a train thus coming in from the village. You see apparently, a row of grain shocks moving off without perceiving the cause of locomotion until, as you look close to the ground, you notice four feet stepping cautiously, and striving to sustain their position with due gravity." As also wine, etc., brought into Jerusalem for sale, not, as in the case of the sheaves, from the farms for garnering. This the next clause, and the nature of the case, show. I testified against them in the day wherein they sold victuals. Read concerning the day, etc., instead of "in the day," etc. He affirmed the divine origin, authority, sanctity, law of the day, speaking for God, and in his name.

Verse 16.—There dwelt men of Tyre, etc.—The word translated "dwelt" may be used of temporary, as well as of permanent residence. Tyre, a great commercial city on the Mediterranean coast, about one hundred and twenty miles from Jerusalem via Joppa, had by its very situation, close relations with the land of the Jews, drawing from it provisions. 1 Chron. xiv. 1; Ezra. iii. 7; Acts xii. 20. These foreigners, Phœnicians, of course, had no regard for the Jewish faith, religion, or law, except as bearing upon their own interests. To trade on the Jewish Sabbath, if they could get any to trade with them, was no violation of their conscience. We see, in this example, why God took such great care to separate, and keep separated, his people from the nations about them. Brought fish. Abundant in the neighboring Mediterranean waters, and cured for traffic. And all manner of ware. See the the magnificent description of the wealth, variety, and extent of Tyre's trade in Ezek. xxxvii. Compare also, chaps. xxxvi. and xxxviii.

Verse 17.—Then I contended with the nobles of Judah, etc., the men in office, whose business it was to know, observe and enforce the laws; they were men of great influence, whose example, even apart from all official connection, was of great weight, and evidently, in this case, on the wrong side. Nehemiah laid the chief responsibility on the leaders, and did not allow their power to serve as their shield from blame.

Verse 18.—Did not your fathers, etc. It appears from Jeremiah xvii. 19-27, that the sin of Sabbath breaking, in just the forms now re-appearing, had been alarmingly and grossly prevalent immediately from the captivity. It was certainly a transgression; but it was also the symptom of a corruption. Yet ye bring more wrath, etc. Literally, Ye are adding wrath upon, etc. The "wrath" here stands for the judgments consequent upon it; the effect viewed in the cause.

Verse 19.—Began to be dark before the Sabbath, etc.—The Jews, like the Athenians, and unlike the Babylonians [noon to noon] and the Romans [midnight to midnight], reckoned their day from sunset to sunset, as though following Gen. 1. 5. See Lev. xxiii. 32. Hence, when the Sabbath began, at sundown on Friday night, he caused the gates to be shut. Charged that they should not be opened. This need not be so pressed as to imply that no man for suitable cause was to be allowed to pass in or out, but that merchants or hucksters might not have entrance with their wares. So the next clause indicates. Till after the Sabbath. Which would be at sundown, Sabbath evening. I sent one of my servants, etc. These, in this passage, were clearly his servants proper, not merely his subjects. As governor, he would by right of office, have many at his command.

Verse 20.—Lodged without Jerusalem.—Possibly, also to be in good time when the gates were opened.

Verse 21.—Then I testified against them.—As before. Whatever the precise motive, or motives, for lodging thus near, it was clearly with an eye to business and hence, was at once transgression, temptation and corruption. I will lay hands on you. Put in force the law. If we have agreed that as subjects of God's law, and before him, the acts are just as binding upon us as upon the Is-

raelites. From that time, etc. Clearly Nehemiah had made himself known as an officer with whom criminals could not trifle.

Verse 22.—Commanded the Levites, etc.—He assigned the care of the gates to his own servants only temporarily; but as a permanent arrangement he put the Levites in charge. The Levites had fallen with the sin of their countryman, as they had to be cleansed. Remember me, etc. See verse 14. This is not an Old Testament legal spirit in opposition to the New Testament gospel spirit, for see Matt. x. 46; Hebrew vi. 9, 10, etc.—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, February 16th, 1879.—The way of the Righteous.—Psalm i. 1-6. Date—probably in Solomon's reign.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—Proverbs iv. 18.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

After review of last lesson, tell how the reading of God's word made the people feel that they had broken many parts of it, and after praying for forgiveness, they made several solemn promises. These were written down, and first Nehemiah himself signed his name, then many of the chief of the people. But they all made the promises. Teach the one relating to the Sabbath.

What promise had Nehemiah made Artaxerxes? In order to keep it he went back to Persia, but after a while returned to Jerusalem. Give graphic pictures of the state of affairs that he found; how the broken promises grieved him; what he said, and what he did.

Ask why the Sabbath is to be kept so holy. God wishes us to think of him every day of the week, but that he gives us the other six to work, and play, and study, but this one he keeps for himself to be all his own. We steal from God when we do not keep the Sabbath.

Tell how strict the Jewish law was about keeping the Sabbath; illustrate by the story of the man picking up sticks (Num. xv. 32-36). This shows what God thinks of Sabbath breaking, but he makes beautiful promises to those who keep his day. Read Isaiah lviii. 13, calling attention to the fact that they are not only to keep the day holy, but to feel that it is a delight to love it.

How did Nehemiah keep the sellers out of the city? We have several gates which must be closed on the Sabbath to all unholy things. Our hands must be closed to our toys, our school books, our every-day works. Our lips must be closed to all foolish talk, all light words. Our ears must be closed to all such talk. Our hearts must be closed to work, to play, to trifling thoughts.

But there are some things for which they must be wide open. Tell some things which Jesus did on the Sabbath. He went to the temple, he read God's word, he listened to it, he taught, he went about doing good, etc.

Here are four things to remember:—Remember God's day, house, word and work.

"Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy."

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

- No. 5. "The Lord is my Shepherd."—Ps. xxiii. 1. 1. Temple... 2 Chron. v. 13, 44. 2. Huldah... 2 Chron. xxxiv. 22, 23. 3. Emmaus... Luke xxiv. 13, 35. [26-28]. 4. Lydia... Acts xvi. 14, 15. 5. Obediah... 1 Kings xviii. 4. 6. Rahab... Ps. lxxxvii. 4; lxxxix. 10. 7. Demas... 2 Tim. iv. 10. [Is. li. 9, 10]. 8. Immanuel... Isa. vii. 14; Matt. i. 23. 9. Sarcophagus... Matt. ii. 2, 9. 10. Moriah... 2 Chron. iii. 1. 11. Ye... 2 Chron. i. 19, 20. 12. Seth... Gen. iv. 26. 13. Heman... 1 Chron. xv. 16, 17. 14. Enoch... Gen. v. 24; Jude xiv. 15. 15. Passover... 1 Cor. v. 7. 16. Haman... Gen. x. 6. 17. Enoch... Matt. xxvii. 18. 18. Roman empire... Luke ii. 1. 19. Deborah... Gen. xxiv. 59; xxxv. 8.

Scripture Enigma.

- No. 6. 1. A warrior who slew his cousin. 2. A Greek letter mentioned in Scripture. 3. An instrument used by Jubal. 4. A time when no one can work. 5. A father-in-law of David. 6. A woman who caused a prophet's death. 7. The basest of the kingdoms. The initials and finals read downwards give a prophet's name and title.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER VI.—The Mother's Sacrifice.

The term of school for Alice had already expired, and she was en route for home. Here all was expectancy. Who has not felt the joy of preparation for an absent loved one? And in that family circle where one or more of the number are kept away for years in our seminaries of learning, the anniversaries and vacations which bring the young students back to their homes are the crowning days of the year. How carefully do mothers and sisters concoct the choicest favorite dishes, and see that cupboard and larder are filled with good things! How anxiously is closet and bed-room aired and inspected; and last, loving, lingering touches drop here and there for the benefit of the dear expected! Oh blame not mothers if they are not over-wise, for mothers alone think with the heart.

But a shadow had fallen across the sunshine of this home, and very grave and anxious faces were making the usual preparations. The little circle already felt the jar of an approaching struggle, knowing well that two powerful wills were to come in contact, flanked on one side by a mother's love and right, and on the other by Christian determination and that winning grace which make all hearts pliable in her hands. So that it was with earnest prayer on their lips that Alice and Hattie sprang up the marble steps of their beautiful home on Wabash Avenue on that chilly April morning for which they had waited with equal dread and longing.

"It was good of you to meet me, Hattie," said Alice; "and such a rainy day, too!"

"You knew that I would, Alice dear. My impatience put to flight all thoughts of rain. You will find mamma in a sad way."

"Poor mother! it is hard that I should make her suffer; but she might have reason to grieve worse. How can she deny me to him who found me when I was lost, wandering from the fold of God?"

A moment more, and her beautiful face was pressed against Fleda's cheek, and showering kisses on the one thrice precious because of suffering. "Dear lamb! how are you? Suffering, but happy! I see it in your face. Only a little while, darling, and the Shepherd will gather you into the green pastures of heaven, and then we can afford to smile at tears and pain." An affectionate smile was her answer from Fleda, but the mother, after a lingering embrace said a little impatiently:

"I suppose Fleda thinks it very easy for you, with your perfect health and strength, to theorize about suffering?"

"Oh no, mamma; I was only thinking how easy to bear it for Jesus' sake," replied Fleda.

"I think it is vastly more for her to lie here and suffer patiently than for us to do active service," continued Alice as they sat down together to lunch, which was served near Fleda's couch that she might enjoy it with them. While sipping chocolate and disposing of sandwiches, crullers, and fruit, Alice was charming her auditors with naive accounts of life at school, of her music and friends, and dispensing smiles and tears and caresses with delicious home freedom. There was so much to tell and more to hear; tender inquiries to make after the big-hearted noble-souled brother to be, Hattie's fiancé. Then their prospects were discussed, but no one ventured on that which was uppermost in thought. At last there was no excuse for further delay, and Alice, rising hastily, cried,

"Mother mine, come! I want to carry you off for a long talk. This call of mine must be settled at once, both for my own sake and that of the friend who awaits my answer."

"I think, my daughter," said Mrs. Hammond, rising and speaking painfully, "that people sometimes think they are called when merely following out their own impulses. Are you sure that your affections are not the only call you have in this matter?"

"I think you knew my desire, dear mother, before an opportunity occurred," said Alice, linking her arm in her

mother's and closing the door behind them.

While Hattie and Fleda were left to themselves, their anxiety found expression in soft whispers and long passages of silence between. Earnest voices and suppressed sobs reached them from the room beyond, which at last increased to a wail of such anguish and tempestuous weeping that Hattie started to her feet, saying:

"I must go to them; this is too much for one time; they have been talking for three hours."

"Do," said Fleda. "I am sure, by that sound that mother has yielded at last; but oh, how she suffers!"

Tapping at the door of the library, Hattie entered without waiting to be bid. Mrs. Hammond was walking the floor with disheveled hair and wringing her hands, while her moans were such as are only wrung from a strong and intensely passionate nature, and that too in death-throes with sin and Satan. Extending her arms to her daughter, with a weary sinking gesture, as if to ease her heart against her breast, she cried:

"Oh, Hattie how can I give her up? Is it duty? Must I? I dare not deny her to my Saviour! Oh, is there no escape?" Turning sharply round upon Alice, she continued with vehement heat, as if in one last struggle with pride and ambition:

"Look at your musical talents and advantages, scarce excelled by any woman on the continent; will you throw away the last seven years of your life?"

"I do not consider that they are thrown away, dear mother; their effects upon my character and education as a discipline, source of joy, and kind of mental tonic can never be lost. Do you not feel this? Besides my music is to be a power, and a great one, among the benighted islanders."

"But, child," continued the mother, "it is such an unknown field, so remote and difficult of access, so out off from the comforts of civilized life and communications with the outside world, and you have been so delicately reared. If it were India or China, I would not so much object."

"Mother," said Hattie, stroking tenderly the bowed head, "you have always believed in the cause of missions and in the duty of Christians to evangelize the world. Some one must go to these remote fields. If God has given the heart to our Alice to be one, shall we not be true to our principles, and let her depart in peace? Nay, more, can you not rejoice that you are called to such an honor? Come let us buckle on her armor, and send her forth gladly to be a light to them that sit in darkness. Dear mamma, will you not give over this struggle? Then you will be happy."

A sudden light came into Mrs. Hammond's eye at the words from her first-born, so truthful and conclusive that they were unanswerable; and rising, she embraced her children calmly saying to Alice:

"Daughter you shall go, and may God give me grace to bear it."

It is curious to note how sudden revulsion of feeling will break down the forced calmness of a soul that has carried its burden with unshrinking fortitude so long as the necessity existed. Thus it was with Alice. Now that her mother had given her sanction the strained cords gave way, and she was weak as a child. Her face had been a study to Hattie on entering the room an hour before. Though bathed in tears, they seemed tears of pity rather than grief. Goodness and tenderness beamed from the eye, but resolution and firmness were as marked about the set of the mouth, while heaven's own seal of peace shone upon the brow. She knew that the right would win. But into what a convulsion of feeling broke that fair young face when there was no further need to contend!

Very precious were the hours of converse between the three sisters during the weeks that followed, while rapid preparations were in progress for the outfit of the young missionary. Mrs. Hammond, however, seemed too much paralyzed by pain and grief to take much share. Here was one of those natures that need much ploughing before they are ready for God's seed, and during the time of sowing lie very bleak and bare. But the seed-time in God's husbandry is sure to yield a harvest.