

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, March 16th, 1879.—De-light in God's House.—Psa. lxxxiv. 1-12.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 8-12.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee."—Psal. lxxxiv. 4.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Psalm lxxxiv. Tuesday, Psalm xlii. Wednesday, 1 Chron. xvi. Thursday, Hebrews x. 24-30. Friday, Acts ii. 37-47. Saturday, Malachi iii. 16-18. Sunday, John iv. 16-26.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Desire for God's house. Vss. 1-3. II. Its blessed influence. Vss. 4-7. III. The prayer of a worshipper. Vss. 8-12.

QUESTIONS.—Under what circumstances was this Psalm written? What are the several meanings of the terms of its title?

I. Vss. 1-3.—How greatly did the Psalmist desire to worship God? What shows that he put God before God's ordinances? Whose happiness did he desire?

II. Vss. 4-7.—Who is held to be especially happy in God's house? Why are religious exercises the most satisfactory? How do difficulties test a man's resolution? What is meant by "they go from strength to strength?" (See Isa. xl. 31: John i. 16: 2 Cor. iii. 18.)

III. Vss. 8-12.—Is it the highest type of prayer always to be suppliant? How is God "a shield?" How "a sun?" What does the Psalmist prefer to be? What is the difference between "grace" and "glory?" Vs. 11. Will God bless unrighteous churchgoers? Vs. 11.

EXPOSITION.—I. Longing for God's house.—Vss. 1-4.—(1) As admiring its beauty; (2) as feeling its loss; (3) as appreciating its fellowship; (4) as delighting in its occupants.

II. Returning to God's House.—Vss. 5-7.—(1) The blessed purpose; (2) the more blessed progress; (3) the most blessed arrival.

III. Worship in God's House.—Vss. 8-12.—(1) Petition for favor; (2) thanksgiving for communion; (3) praise for covenant mercies; (4) a benediction on God's servants.

Verses 1-4.—The first verse is an exclamation, an outburst of loving admiration, hearty and intense. The Psalmist was an Israelite, and the spirit of a true Israelite focalized at Jerusalem, and at the sanctuary in Jerusalem. Tabernacles. Literally, dwellings—not tents. The word is plural—not to designate more than one temple, or house of God, for the Israelites had and knew but one—but, as in xliii. 3, and xlvii. 4, for the one temple, either in the way of emphasis, or in reference to the parts of the sanctuary; for example, the building and its courts. Amiable. That is, lovely, as worthy of love, and actually loved. O Lord [Jehovah] of hosts. Elsewhere, we have found the word for "hosts" (Sabbath), transferred, and not translated. The innumerable armies of holy and worshipping angels are meant. This clause indicates what made the temple lovely in the Psalmist's eyes. It was its situation, its splendor, or its natural character; but the fact that God, his God, Jehovah the Supreme, there met and welcomed his people—revealing and communicating, not his grace only, but himself.

The expression of the second verse, would perfectly fit the experience of a devout Israelite, living at such distance from Jerusalem as to make it practicable to go up only to the three great festivals. He looked forward to the day of starting, planned, watched, prepared for it; and, as the day drew near, his heart grew more and more warm, till it fairly "burned within him," and the fire burst out into such words as these: Longeth. Literally, grows pale. Fainteth. Literally, pines away. The second stronger than the first—longs, and even pines. The courts, consisted of the enclosed, but unroofed space, in front of and around the temple-building. My heart and my flesh. Taken with soul, strongly asserts the singleness and intensity of his desire—his whole being was in it—and this is more emphasized by the expression, crieth out. It was for the living God. Not to meet his people, or see the city and house; but to meet God—the deepest want of man's being. God is called the living God, not simply in opposition to lifeless idols, but as doing something both for and in his people—the source of that inward life which satisfied the Psalmist's inward thirst.

The figure of the sparrow and swallow, in vs. 3, is not to indicate the neglect or desolation of the sanctuary, of which the Psalm has no trace elsewhere; but to express the Psalmist's sense of the sweetness and beauty of that home-life which God's family have in permanent fellowship with God in his presence. He has grasped, and he feels; the inward meaning and power of the symbolism of the temple, and its service. The altars are mentioned, not as designating the exact place where the birds would build their nests, but as the most significant object in the worship, and most vitally related to that home-life in sonship, which the figure presents. We are reconciled to God by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Mark here, again, the fond repetitions of God, as showing the very spring and life of this song.

Still, in vs. 4, means continually.

Verses 5-7.—The ways, are best understood of the roads, leading up to Jerusalem, over which the pilgrims traveled. The strength needed for the journey, and recognized as at once from God and for him, was cause for thankfulness. The sick could not go up on these journeys. Of course, the thought does not stop with physical strength; just as, in the preceding verses, it does not stop with the mere temple, and its outward service.

In vs. 6, we have the pilgrims—the Psalmist, with his companions—on the way to the city, carrying the purpose into effect. The valley of Baca—is the valley of weeping; such parts of the journey as would be beset with difficulties, and give occasion for weeping—especially as being a dry, hot, dusty, waterless desert-place, as the connection implies. The spirit of holy enthusiasm in the pilgrims, made the obstacles as nothing. They wore such countenances of joy, as to others come only from an easy, smiling, pleasant way. The rain also filleth [literally, clothe] or covereth] the pools. Two other translations are possible. "The teacher is clothed in blessings." "The rain [that is, the early, or seed-time rain], clothe it [the valley], with blessings." The first and the third renderings more obviously fit the connection, and complete the figure. Such desert places are transformed by the enthusiasm of the pilgrims, as though by the fall of the early rain.

As the pilgrims near the Holy City, they feel no growing weakness, as the length and difficulties of the journey might lead us to expect. But their enthusiasm increases, and this not only extinguishes all sense of weariness, but is, in effect, an increase of strength. The pace quickens, the eye kindles, the voice rings out more clear and strong. The renewal of the inner man invigorates the outer man. And now the city, the temple, is reached. They appear before God. The technical term for appearance in the temple, for the purpose of worship. The goal is reached. This is the end of the long and eager yearning. Nothing now remains but to worship.

Verses 8-12.—These bring to view, not the ceremonial, outward acts of worship, but the inward movement of soul in the sense of God's presence, and all that this implied to the pious Hebrew. We have, in vs. 8, 9, petitions—first for a gracious hearing, and next, for that for which the Psalmist wishes to be heard. The burden of his prayer is for God's anointed—that is, for Israel, as represented in its national head. It is not a selfish prayer; but one in which, like Paul's recorded prayers, and chiefly like Christ's intercessory prayer, the whole family are presented for God's blessing.

We regard vs. 10 and 11 as utterances of the worshippers within the courts. The sweets of communion there are on the lips of the Psalmist, and in his heart. He makes one day here not merely as good, but better, indefinitely, if not infinitely better, than a thousand days elsewhere. He makes the lowest, least desirable position in connection with God's house, more desirable, than the best of places elsewhere. To be a door-keeper, is literally to threshold—that is, to remain at the threshold only permitted to look in.

God is the good of his children in all times, and in all relations. A Sun—as giving light and heat, knowledge and life. A Shield—as guarding against hostile forces and influences. Grace is divine favor, which ends in glory. The glory follows the grace, as its consummation. To those not upright, there is no promise.

The Psalm closes with an acknowledgment to God of the blessedness of God's servant.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, March 23rd, 1879.—The All-seeing God.—Psal. cxxxix. 1-2.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Thou God seest me."—Gen. xvi. 13.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

David worshipped the Lord! It was not in a temple, but a large tent, called a—? Tabernacle. Describe his great love for it, and how much he longed to build a better one; how though not permitted to do so, he gathered the materials for it, etc. David wrote a beautiful song about God's house, which he sang to the music of his harp; we will read some of it (read vs. 1-4), having class repeat.

"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God." (Explain how the Jews used to have to leave their shoes at the door; though we need not do that, we can be careful not to make a noise.)

Teach what they should do in God's house. They can keep silence; if they cannot sing, they can listen to the words and sing in their hearts; bow their heads during prayer, and try to follow it; listen to the sermon, and try to remember it.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 10.

JORDAN, NAAMAN.—2 Kings v.

- 1. J onah a 1 Samuel xviii. 1.
2. O meg a Rev. xxii. 13.
3. R eb a Numbers xxxi. 8.
4. D iade m Isa. lxii. 3.
5. A nn a Luke ii. 36.
6. N u Joshua ii.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 11.

Orphaned, the maiden found in thee a stay; The queen obeyed thy bidding, day by day.

- 1. Saved, to entail a curse upon thy son.
2. Two drove the cart bearing the ark: Name one.
3. Dear title given by Christ for she believed.
4. Hero Dagon fell, and his death-blow received.
5. She ministered to Christ, in life and death.
6. This tongue the Chaldeans spoke, with bated breath.
7. A Jew, in Pontus born; from Rome he came.
8. Slain art thou, on this day of grief and shame.

Select Serial.

Ponape; or, Light, on a Dark Shore.

BY MRS. HELEN S. THOMPSON.

CHAPTER XI.—The Saybrook family.

John Saybrook was a character, certainly—or perhaps I should have said a type of character—not so very rare, but seldom well developed. During the transition state between boyhood and manhood there was a strange mingling of inharmonious traits, that made it difficult to bode what sort of man he would make.

This was due largely to inherited traits, but more to the pressure of peculiar circumstances which dwarf or expand human souls according to their calibre. The rich blossoms of his nature were hid beneath a reserve impenetrable that one needed to press close to find them.

Certain it is that John Saybrook possessed the elements of true manhood in an admirable degree, while to the world for many years he was merely "a most worthy man." However, God had a work for him which would call for the development and use of all his faculties, and he being a willing servant who studied every Lord's will, would learn to adapt every power to the largest use.

Deacon Saybrook was a stern, staunch Puritan, full of energy, fire, and go-ahead-iveness, with a will of iron, mingled with not a little combativeness. Therefore it is not surprising that by some he was called "set" and "dictatorial," though these censurers were nothing loth to depend on him in any movement requiring the deacon's strong grip and large purse. He was a godly man—perhaps rigid and severe in his religion, but devoutly conscientious.

But the wife that nestled in his bosom, like a dove was godly and conscientious too, yet without austerity. A deep tenderness pervaded her being, and brooded over husband and children with exquisite grace during the few short years in which she might enfold them; and when she answered God's call, the door to the deacon's heart was shut and locked, and none might open it, for the sainted wife had carried the key to heaven.

To her babes was left the legacy, not merely of a mother's prayers—precious gifts, these—but of a mother's graces, and the seeds of nurture and inheritance were sure to germinate, bud, and blossom in due time. There were three of them—John, Marion, and Louis; and John, being the eldest, could well remember the day, the hour, the melting scene, and even now can feel the thrill of her light touch on his bowed head, as she prayed to God to guard her treasures from sin and evil, and committed to him, her darling boy, the little ones. What wonder that John grew old with the weight of such a trust?

From that hour life took on a solemn meaning to the boy, and became invested with new dignity and purpose. A gentle voice seemed ever ringing in his ears, saying, "I shall watch you and be with you every day, my son; if ever you are in doubt, darling, ask God." Between him and his grave and reticent father a silent sympathy was established—beautiful, indeed, but sad in its extreme reserve. John knew, however, that his father trusted, almost leaned upon, him; and this, with the stimulus of an angel mother's love and trust, cheered the twelve-year-old boy through many a doubtful struggle. Thus did he study and work till old enough to enter college. His parents had dedicated him to the Christian ministry, and John was eager to commence his collegiate course; but at this time his sister Marion was giving him great anxiety. She was beautiful as a dream and strangely bewitching, but wild and wayward. "Strange that father should be so blind," thought John. "What would mother have me to do to keep her in right paths?"

"Ask God," came the sweet-voiced answer. Is it strange that it often seemed to him that his mother was allowed to guard her child and to direct his heart to the one Source of help, and that he came to look on her as one of those "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister unto them who shall be the heirs of salvation"?

With his eye fixed on the bow of promise, John left his sister for two years, at the end of which he was hastily recalled to his home on account of a serious injury occurring to Louis, which insulted in making him a helpless cripple. This sore trial necessitated his leaving college for a year that he might assist in nursing and cheering the boy-brother scarce yet in his teens. During this time Marion took her first lessons in patient endurance from one brother and quiet self-abnegation from the other; and though she danced about as gayly as ever, John's watchful eyes could detect a hidden pain and longing; and dropping here and there "a word fitly spoken," an "apple of gold," he felt that at least his gay-hearted sister was learning to think. One of the first fruits of this was manifest in her wish that John should return to college and yield her his place in the sick-room. Louis, too, though he clung to his brother with a worshipful love, said "Go," also.

Perhaps no later record of John's eventful life could give a richer testimony than those four years of college life. Said one who was an unbeliever, "I think his life the most like what Jesus Christ's must have been when he walked this earth of any one I ever knew. If all Christians were like him, there would be no infidels."

At the end of his course John experienced the greatest struggle of his life. Deacon Saybrook had just met with reverses which would result in much-diminished means. Where now were his cherished hopes? From whence were to come the luxuries to cheer his father's old age, brighten Louis' sick-room, and which seemed the very pith of Marion's existence? His father not only was unable to assist him; but clearly needed his help. There were seminaries to assist indigent young men,

but, "What would mother say?" What would God have me to do? I can work my own way through a wall, if need be; but would it not be cowardly to desert my trust? Could I thus face God and the people from a pulpit? Nay, get thee behind me, Satan!" and John Saybrook triumphed, as do all who stand by their conscience.

When the indications of Providence were clearly understood, he cheerfully entered the path, and bided his time for the fruition of earlier hopes. If he suffered, God, and perhaps his mother, alone knew. Determined to make his literary attainments of practical use, John chose journalism for a profession, the avails from which would suffice to meet the daily exigencies of his family. Wielding a versatile pen, and keeping thus in the world of letters, was a daily inspiration which infused itself with delicious cheer throughout the atmosphere of home.

"Ah, what joy is borne into the soul as the result of a self-sacrifice nobly met! God's compensatory laws never fail to make good such losses. These were growing days with John Saybrook, and his life broadened and deepened under its daily discipline. One knew this by his look, his voice, his glowing pen, and his rare power over others. Thus two years passed away, and Deacon Saybrook, weakened by the sad reverses of his life, passed from earth to take up again the broken threads dropped years before "at the door when his angel wife passed in."

"I had hoped," he said, "to see you in the ministry, my son, but have seemed to hinder instead of helping you. Yet surely there are no hindrances in the line of God's marking; all will yet be well, and you will preach the better for the seeming obstacles. You have been the best of sons and brothers; now take your father's blessing."

"In after years, when relating this scene to a discouraged young man in his pastorate, disheartened under the weight of family claims, John declared with characteristic energy, "That was the happiest hour of my life. Young man, you may gladly sacrifice every ambitious hope of your life to hear such words from a dying parent."

After his father's death John placed his sister under careful instructors, and devoted all the time possible with his literary labors to the care of his suffering brother, who, from great pain and helplessness, demanded the tenderness and gentleness of a woman's touch. He had learned this to perfection, nursing, lifting, and carrying in his arms the boy who had never grown since he was thirteen years old. In this school were developed those softened, delicate traits of character so choice and beautiful when combined with more manly ones. If friends remonstrated, begging him to hire the needed care for Louis and go on with his theological studies, he replied, with a smile: "I am learning of this little preacher now, and I assure you it is better teaching than any school of divinity could give."

Often at night the passer-by would catch the strong, clear notes of some inspiring hymn floating out upon the midnight air, or the deep voice of earnest prayer told its own tale of need within. Thus carried in arms of love and faith, the stricken lad was learning "from pain's dark well to draw delight," and the young student of theology was conning rich lessons which would give him rare fitness for a pastor's work.

Marion was only happy at school by comparison. Anything like trouble or responsibility was a sad fetter to her singularly careless nature. She loved her brothers with a passionate devotion, but the suffering of one and the toil and cross of the other were unendurable to her. This same dislike of personal obligation made school duties irksome also. That she was a universal favorite was no credit to herself, but that she did carry all hearts by storm was undeniable. The better possibilities of her nature lay dormant as yet, but an irresistible nativell and archness, combined with uncommon beauty, covered many a defect of character, and made teachers and mates oblivious to serious failures and derelictions. The aesthetic traits of her nature led her with ease into the realms of music and art, but solid study was not for her. Yet she never disgraced herself by public failures, but often carried away the palm from really studious and thorough pupils. The seasons of deep religious interest, during which she was made a subject of earnest prayer and effort, came and went without an apparent ruffle of thought or feeling.