

Sunday Reading.

The Law of Love.

(2 Kings iv. 3)

Pour forth the oil—pour boldly forth; It will not fail until Thou fallest vessels to provide Which it may largely fill. Make channels for the streams of love, Where they may broadly run; And love has overflowing streams To fill them every one. But if at any time we cease Such channels to provide, The very fountains of love for us Will soon be parched and dried; For we must share if we would keep That blessing from above— Ceasing to give, we cease to have— Such is the law of love. —R. C. Trench.

A Languid and Limp Young Man.

BY C. H. SPURGEON.

We think it was Mr. Pinch who gave us the phrase, "a languid and limp young man." The immediate application of it is no concern of ours at this moment; we borrow the label to affix it to another article. We greatly fear that limps is the vice of the present day. We see it most mischievously in ordinary morals, where so many are easily crumpled up by the hand of any dissolute example which may grasp them. Many a gentleman of the period may be described as "bound in cloth—limp." The young man would be good enough if left alone, or retained in the society of his Christian friends; but when he gets out into the world he falls in the way of the vicious, and at once yields himself to their evil influence. He is afraid of being thought a Molly-coddle, or a Puritan; and he feels a jest as if it were a hot iron on his cheek, or a dagger at his breast. Rather than be laughed at by strangers he acts so as to be wept over by his friends. It is not possible to put him under a glass-case, or keep him for ever in a nursery tied to his mother's apron-strings; he must go abroad where temptation will surround him, for this is the inheritance of us all. Not even from Paradise was the tempter absent, much less from any part of this present evil world. If the young man could be kept for ever out of the way of those trials of life which are common to men he would only grow up to be a sickly conservatory-plant, and no robust manhood would be developed in him. It is according to the order of Providence that he should be subjected to the same experience as other men, and be tempted to the same sins; and hence it is that his "limpness" becomes the bane of his being, the quality which prevents the foundation and upbuilding of a noble character. Oh, that the young man had the backbone of conscientiousness, and the grit of honourable principle in him, then could he defy the fascinations of vicious pleasure, and live for honour, and glory, and immortality!

We have no wish to be over-critical, but it does strike us that, in religious circles, the most glaring evil of the time is "limpness." There were days in which bigotry was the evident transgression of the age—bigotry, keen of eye and fierce of heart. A man could not think without feeling it to be his duty to make others think with him: he ran on a tram, and insisted that every other wheel should keep to his track. If he believed, he believed intensely,—which was right; but he also abhorred and detested everybody who did not believe in the selfsame fashion,—which was wrong. To seek their conversion to the truth would have been praiseworthy, if the only legitimate means of conversion had been constantly used, and nothing beyond; but the passion of the mind, blotted with a supposed infallibility of intellect, led to persecution, or at the least to bitter words or silent hate. Then men were granite blocks, and dashed their angles against each other with an eager delight in collision. Even the best of Christian men isolated themselves from one another because of differences which were little better than microscopic; new communions were set up with huge walls between them, solely to guard a point which only the quick-eyed were able to perceive. Combative faculties were to the

front, and the gentler graces were sorely vexed. Men earnestly contended for the faith; but love was too often forgotten amid the din of theological conflict. There was much about such a state of things to deplore, and we by no means desire its return. Yet, on looking back upon the period, we see as much to commend as to condemn. We cannot but believe that the intense love of truth, which pervasively led up to bigotry, was in itself a precious thing, a virtue which ought to have been conserved when the excrescence which grew out of it was cut away. We fear that when bigotry was swept overboard, much went with it that never ought to have been given up. The storm which wrecked the pirate Bigotry beat furiously also upon the good ship Principle. Perhaps, to root up a weed, a field of wheat has been sacrificed; possibly, to remove a wart from the face, a noble countenance has been effaced. There lived in the past men who believed with all their heart, and soul, and strength; held truth against all comers, as the Spartans held Thermopylae; sacrificed comfort, honour, everything, out of loyal obedience to their God; and therefore were men of power. Such men, with all their faults, deserve rather to be regarded as examples than as beacons. Would God we had ten thousand such among us in this time-serving hour! Above all things, the church needs a regiment of Iliadsides—men of mettle, men of truth.

To-day the many have swung round to an evil, which, if it be the reverse of bigotry, is at least equally vicious, and as we believe, far more terribly mischievous. The bulk of the people around us believe nothing in order that they may never be dogmatical. Falseness and error are alike to them, in order that they may be "hail-fellows" with professors of every creed. That they may be regarded as liberal, they give up everything that is worth possessing. They are disloyal to God in order to be charitable to men. We meet every day with persons who are altogether molluscous as to spiritual matters: there is not a bone in the whole body of their religion. If they were worth the trouble, one might fashion them into any possible shape; but as they are constantly on the change, and are ready to be fashioned a second, or a third, or a hundredth time into another form, they do not repay the effort to influence them. The material itself is so bad that the best work would be thrown away on them. A sculptor desires a block of marble, but these creatures have scarcely the consistency of wax. He who works for eternity shuns them, for he cares not to write on water.

We have limp preachers. It is not known by any of their hearers to what order of thought they belong, for nothing is definite in their teaching: their discourses are a brilliant haze. They would incline to the right, only they have some leanings to the left also; they are this, that, and the other, and yet none of them, as the dog barks. It is difficult to believe that they regard any doctrine or ordinance as of such importance as to deserve a martyr's life or death for its defense. Had not the preachers lacked decision, things would not have reached the state of doubt which now so sadly rules the hour. We have, also, thousands of limp hearers, who admire every "clever" man; yes, "clever," that is the word; they never speak of the preacher as devout, or earnest, or instructive, much less as orthodox; their one word is "clever." He can speak fluently, his action is striking, his style is imposing; indeed, the whole thing is an imposition. Principle, doctrine, consistency—these are words which many utterly despise, and think that all who use them are cants, hypocrites, or at best old-fashioned fanatics. Custom is their law, taste is their righteousness, and "culture" is their gospel. The widest divergence from Scripture is regarded by these "thinkers" as a very trivial difference. If one who has preached the gospel admirably in former years has at length denied the essential doctrines of it, the only remark that is made by these limp Christians is that he still holds the essence of the faith, though he has abjured the antique expressions which are retained by the unprogressive. When the life, soul, and essence of a doctrine are re-

nounced, these blind men can distinctly see it still there. There is no knowing to what lengths this fooling may go. We may live to see men calling themselves Christians, and differing in no single item from Mahometans; in fact, even now, there are religionists among us who are not so near the truth as the followers of the false prophet. At the present rate of progress we may have temples for devil-worship erected in our cities, and the votaries thereof may be regarded as a somewhat electric branch of the Christian community. They may even get elected to office in the various denominations, for it will be easy for them to twist our creeds, and override our trust deeds.

There is no end to this limpness. It slobbers Judas Iscariot with its affectionate kisses; and adds to its prayers a petition for the restoration of the devil. We are getting a considerable distance in the race towards perdition when the indiscriminate intercourse of the sexes is recommended as a more philosophic practise than that of marriage; and a Christianity, from which the Fall and the Atonement have both been eliminated, is regarded as the typical faith of "this enlightened nineteenth century!"

Believers of the olden type would have been in no doubt as to what to do with the deadly errors of the period. The old deacons of the past would soon have purged the pulpits of the present infection, or else the members of the churches would have left the pews to be occupied by rats and spiders. Even the matrons of a period not quite forgotten would have sufficed to protect the churches from the deadly errors which are now thrust upon them. Imagine our Nonconforming fathers enduring the varnished infidelity which seeks to palm itself off as enlightened Christianity.

Alas! the faithful fail from among men: "Was there a shield or a spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?" Oak has given place to willow; everybody has grown limp. Out of the prevalence of limpness has come an admiration of it. A man cannot speak a plain word without being accused of bitterness, and if he denounces error he is narrow-minded; for all must join the Universal Admiration Company, or be placed under ban, and be howled down. This is of small consequence; the mischief is, that the fear of being charged with bitterness and narrowness has terrors for so many, who ought rather to rejoice in being thus falsely accused. Brave spirits can afford to bear the present phase of the world's madness, confident that, when the Lord gives sanity, men will return to the primitive truth, and cast their idols away. Most limp articles ere long are put into the dirty-linen basket to abide in soiled company till the general wash. We earnestly pray that the day may soon come round.

By what process is this deplorable limpness to be taken away from the present age? Some would accomplish it by the use of a starchy propriety. They would be stiffly orthodox about unimportant things; they would revive rigid rules and crabbed crotchets, and hold fast to matters of mere church-custom, about which Scripture is entirely silent. This is a plan for rapidly removing limpness, but it does not answer in the long run, for with the first shower of rain the limpness returns with equal force. The starch loses its power, and the material which it stiffened is as limp as ever.

Others propose to dip the limp material in a potent acid. According to their ideas, truth can only be conserved in vinegar. The gospel is to be plunged into a decoction of Peruvian bark, and thus to be preserved from decay. We do not believe in the wisdom of the suggestion. There is such a thing as reaction, and a savage orthodoxy usually begets a frivolous unbelief.

The fact is that the material itself must be changed. The grace of God must take away the limp soul, and give a firm and steadfast spirit. A deep and intense sense of the evil of sin, a thorough experience of the work of the law upon the conscience, and an insight into the folly and weakness of human nature: these are grand preparations for a solid character. If repentance were deeper and faith more simple men's beliefs would be more clear and firm. Follow up a humble sense of

sin with a perception of the sovereignty of divine grace, a participation in the renewing work of the Holy Ghost, and an abundant entrance into that life which deals with spiritual and eternal verities; and then you have a man capable of being a believer—a believer indeed. Let him sit at the feet of Jesus, to learn of him, and he will know what he knows; and when he speaks men will perceive his boldness, and take knowledge of him that he has been with Jesus, and has learnt of him. He will care too much for his Lord to fish for the approval of men. He will hold truth with too firm a grip to play at battledoer and shuttlecock with revelation. He will be neither limp nor languid; but steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. All this he will be, and yet he will feel no bitterness towards those who err. Why should he? His own light is the gift of sovereign grace; why should he be wroth with the blind who sit in darkness? Adherence to truth does not necessitate anger and bitterness; the reverse is really the case; truth is congruous with love, and consorts with charity. To hate error with perfect hatred, and yet to love the erring, may seem a hard task; but the Holy Spirit can help us to perform it. Instead of the loathsome combination of "limp and languid," may we exhibit the far finer characteristics of firm, but generous.—Sword and Trowel

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1883. FIRST QUARTER. Lesson XI.—MARCH 18, 1883.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MARTYR. Acts vii. 54-60; viii. 1-4.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: ch. vii. Vs. 54-60.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. xi. 10.

DAILY HOME READINGS.

- M. The Lesson, Acts vii. 54-60; viii. 1-4. T. Why Israel was Rejected, Matt. xxi. 33-46. W. Stephen's Speech, Acts vii. 1-29. T. Stephen's Speech, Acts vii. 30-53. F. A Glimpse of Heaven, Rev. ch. iv. S. The Course Finished, 2 Tim. ch. iv. S. The Spirit's Work Crowned, Rev. vii. 9-17.

COMPLETION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S WORK IN A HUMAN SOUL.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Supernatural Sight, Vs. 54-57. II. Triumph in Death, Vs. 58-60. III. Life Out of Death, Chap. viii. 1-4.

QUESTIONS.—What change in popular feeling? Of what was Stephen accused? Vs. 54-57.—What enraged the Council? How did they show it? What was said of Stephen? What power was given him? What do dying Christians sometimes see? How ought we to live and act? Heb. xi. 27. Vs. 58-60.—What did the rulers pretend? How and where was Stephen put to death? Did he expect to be unconscious after death? What did he expect? What prayer for his murderers? What did this show? What is his death called? Why? Where do faithful Christians go at death? Of what was Stephen's life and death an example? Does the Holy Spirit do such work now? How is it completed and crowned?

Chap. viii. 1-4.—How was Stephen buried? What is said of Saul? What broke out? What outrages did Saul commit? What did he say about it afterward? Scripture Searchings.—Find instances of supernatural sight in the references and elsewhere in the Bible. Make parallel list of passages concerning treatment of Jesus and of Stephen. Find proofs that the dying believer does at once enter into glory.

We left Stephen, in our last lesson, dragged before the Council to meet the charge of blasphemy. We pass over his noble defence—a speech remarkable for clear, cogent reasoning; for spiritual breadth, and for convicting power—and come to the effects upon the Council.

Notes.—I. The Opened Heavens, (Vs. 54-56). Vs. 54.—These things. The masterly defence of Stephen, with his scathing arraignment of the Council; a speech in which his object was not to save his life, but to vindicate the truth. Out to the heart. Literally, *sawn asunder*. Exasperated beyond measure. The gospel is a savor of life unto life, or of death unto death. Gnashed on him with their teeth. An expression of impatient rage. Had they been able to answer him, they might have been less

various. See this phrase, in the description of the lost in hell, in Matt. viii. 12; xiii. 42.

Vs. 55, 56.—Full of the Holy Ghost. Mark the contrast. His persecutors torn with the passions of hell; he, filled with the serenity and sweetness of heaven, sustained by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Looked up steadfastly into heaven. His enemies were lost to his view, and had no power over him. Henceforth he was as one not on the earth, but already in the glory. Saw the glory of God, etc. The Spirit within him revealed to him the scene; for it was not a vision of the senses, nor was it given to those about him. Jesus standing. Not sitting in the dignity of repose, as elsewhere represented (Matt. xxvi. 64); but standing, as on the alert to sustain and receive his dying saint. The right hand of God. The position of majesty and power, as one able to save to the uttermost. And said. His relation of his vision would tend to enrage them the more; for he tells them that the one whom they crucified was exalted to supreme dominion. The heavens opened. Are they not always opened? But only spiritual vision can see them. May not this same vision be given now to dying saints, explaining the rapture often seen upon their faces in their closing moments? Son of man. Our Lord's favorite title for himself when on earth. He is the same Saviour in heaven whom we know here, with all the human sympathies and affections, as well as divine power and glory.

II. The Death of Stephen, (Vs. 57-60).

Vs. 57, 58.—This relation of the vision of the crucified as glorified, excited the Council to irrepressible fury. They forgot their dignity as a judicial body, and were converted into a howling mob. They cried out with a loud voice, drowning his voice by their clamors for his immediate death; stopped their ears, that they might not hear any more of what they chose to call his blasphemy; and ran upon him with one accord, not hesitating to commit murder—for it does not seem that they either passed a legal decision against him, or had the power under the Roman Government, to execute it—they were scrupulous as to the place. Jerusalem was sacred. Malefactors must be put to death without the gates of the city (Lev. xxiv. 14). Hence they cast him out of the city—"straining out the gnat and swallowing the camel." There they stoned him. Stoning was the punishment of such as endeavored to turn the people away from the true worship of God; hence, of blasphemy (Deut. xiii. 5-10). The witnesses, who were, according to Deut. xvii. 17, to cast the first stones, laid their clothes, i. e., their long outer garments, which would have hindered them, at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. Our first introduction to the great apostle to the Gentiles.

Vs. 59, 60.—Calling upon God. The original is simply, *crying out*, or *invoking*. Stephen made Jesus an object of worship, and to him directed his prayer. Receive my spirit. So prayed our Lord to the Father, (Luke xxiii. 46). Kneeling down. Amid the crash of stones, his last act is taking the position of prayer; and his last words a petition for his enemies—Lay not this sin to their charge. Compare Christ's prayer on the cross for his enemies, and see how deeply the martyr had drunk of the spirit of his Master. Fell asleep. Though the victim of violence, death had no terror; but he breathed out his life as sweetly as an infant taking his sleep.

III. Saul of Tarsus, (Vs. 1-4).

Vs. 1.—Consenting. He was in full sympathy with the whole matter of Stephen's death. The stoning of Stephen was the immediate forerunner of a great persecution. The enemies of the Christian faith, determined to exterminate the new faith. All scattered abroad. Christian assemblies were broken up in Jerusalem, and the people, generally, dispersed. They went into the regions of Judea and Samaria, and some even as far as "Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word," (xi. 19). Thus was the wrath of its enemies overruled to the enlargement of the Christian church. Except the apostles. Who remained, at whatever risk, to watch over the infant cause, at the very centre of life.

Vs. 2.—Devout men. Pious Jews, who could honor such courage and fidelity. Paid a tribute to Stephen's worth, and gave a protest against his murder by carrying him to his burial, and making a great lamentation over him.

Vs. 3, 4.—Saul, "having received authority from the chief priests" (xxvi. 10), made havoc of the church. See Phil. iii. 6; Gal. i. 13. Raging as a wild beast, he made thorough search, entering every house, and halting, dragging forth men and women, and imprisoning them. Preaching the word. Thus, the very means employed to destroy the church, spread the gospel every where, both among Jews and Gentiles.

SUGGESTED LESSONS. The gospel, faithfully proclaimed, kindles a fire within men, which either devours sin, or turns its flame upon the preacher.

The spiritual world is very near us. Heaven is but a step from the child of God, and Jesus is there, ready to receive every dying saint.

Our brightest visions often come with our sorest trials.

Praying breath is not spent in vain. The prayer of Stephen for his enemies, is answered in the conversion of the fiercest of them all.

Stephen may have done more in his death than he could by a long life, if, through his martyrdom, Saul of Tarsus was given to the church.

Help for Parents, or for the Teacher of the Primary Class.

LESSON THOUGHT:—Faithful unto death.

TRUTHS TO BE TAUGHT:—1. The wickedness of the wicked. 2. The truth is worth more than life. 3. Reward of faithfulness.

Our lesson for to-day is entitled "The First Christian Martyr." Tell the meaning of the word martyr, giving your life for the truth. What made Stephen's face look like that of an angel? He was then standing before the great council of the Jews. The high priest asked him if what the false witnesses said was true. Then Stephen spoke, and said to the council some plain, but true words. He preached Jesus to them. These men pretended to be good—very good—but they were really very wicked. When Stephen spoke further, about seeing Jesus, these men stopped their ears, ran upon him, cast him out of the city, and stoned him to death. What had he done to deserve death? Why did they kill him? (Because he preached Jesus). Then he gave his life for the truth? Yes, that made him a martyr. He thought more of the truth than he did of life. His faithfulness was rewarded. (Explain the nature of his reward. He was sustained in all his work; before the council; amid the mob; and even when death was closing in upon him; and had a view of heaven opened, with Jesus standing ready to receive him). We have now had a picture of Stephen. Let us think a little about it. Jesus said that the pure in heart shall see God. He told us we must always look to him for grace and strength. Now, if we do this, we shall have him really in our hearts; and if he is in the heart, it will be shown in the life. Stephen's beautiful life made his face beautiful. A beautiful heart always makes a beautiful life, and a beautiful life makes a beautiful face. He had nothing to fear, because they could only kill the body. His soul was safe. "He fell asleep." The Christian does not die; he lives forever. The body dies, but then the soul goes to God, to dwell with him forever. To him comes the reward which Jesus gives. Here are three things to remember:

- 1. God's truth is worth more than life. 2. I should be faithful unto death. 3. Jesus and heaven are always near. —Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

John Ploughman's Talks.

Self is always at home. Water plants before they wither. Soft words scald not the mouth. Sunday is the summer of the week. One tale is good till another is told. Care makes a man old before his time.

That which covers thee discovers thee. Mind the corner where life's road turns. Christ saves sinners from being sinners.

Don't ask a great plaster for a small sore. If you sow thorns, you will not reap roses.

Down with the nests, and the rooks will go. Good stuff is often twisted into queer shapes. Don't spare the butcher and fee the doctor.

Have no friends you dare not bring home. One man's fault should be another man's lesson. Flowers smell sweet whether men are near or not.

He who gives before we ask will give when asked. When prayers are strongest mercies are nearest. The goodness of news half lies in the hearer's ears.

It's no use mending the tank when the water is gone. Stand on your head, and the world will be upside down.—Baptist Weekly