



SUNDAY READING

A TRINITY SUNDAY SERVICE.

BIBLE QUESTION COMPETITION.

This competition is open to all the readers of PROGRESS, but is more especially intended to interest the young people—the boys and girls who are, or should be attending Sunday school. The following rules should be strictly observed:

RULES FOR COMPETITORS.

- 1. A prize of one dollar will be awarded every week for the first correct answer that reaches PROGRESS office. If there is no correct answer the person who sends the first best answer will receive the dollar. In case two correct answers reach the office at the same time the dating stamps of the post offices at which they are mailed will be taken into consideration.
2. Competitors must write on one side of the paper only, giving name and address in full with each answer. These need not be published except in the case of prize-winners and successful competitors.
3. The winner of a prize will not be eligible to compete for another for four weeks.
4. All replies must be received on or before Saturday one week after publication of the questions, thus allowing competitors a clear week for their efforts.
5. No post-cards can be received. All replies should be addressed to the "SUNDAY READING," EDITOR PROGRESS, St. John, N. B.

I am glad the boys are again entering the competition list with their sisters. Master Daniel Oscar McDougall, Long Reach, is the successful competitor for "Prize Bible Questions" No. 17. I know boys have the ability, when they wish to compete, to carry off the prize, but they sometimes lack the patient perseverance of the gentler sex. Remember the story of the hare and the tortoise. "Slow and steady win the race." Among the correct answers received are the names of Miss Florence Boyce, Fredericton; Miss Maria Boyce, Fredericton; Miss Mary A. Patton, city; Master Douglas G. Guest, Yarmouth; Miss Nellie Flewelling, Centreville, and Miss Jessie J. Lawson, Carleton. There were many very excellent answers given to the first question. At Athens Paul disputed with the Jews and devoted men, in the synagogue and in the market place. He defended the doctrines of the gospel from the Epicureans and Stoics, who were virtually atheist philosophers at Aroepagus, or Mar's hill, the seat of the ancient supreme court at Athens.

These philosophers having heard Paul discoursing day after day in the market place took him to the hill of Mars to hear more fully the history of Jesus Christ. From this summit Paul could see the idolatrous structures which everywhere filled the city. He denounced with great boldness and power the sin of idol worship. None could confute, and many were converted, but it was in the school of Tyrannus, at Ephesus, who is supposed to have been a Greek teacher of philosophy converted to christianity, where Paul proposed and defended the gospel. The second and third questions were answered correctly by all. In answers to scripture character there was a mistake by a new competitor, who thought the various statements referred to different persons, which was quite justifiable, as I see scripture character No. 5 is put in the plural number—a misprint of an s.

Answers to Prize Bible Questions No. 17. 1. "St. Paul disputed daily in the school of one Tyrannus" (Acts xix: 9) "by the space of two years." This school was a lecture-room in which philosophical subjects were discussed. Such places were common in Greek cities.
2. The term "martyr" occurs three times, at least, in the New Testament. (1) "Thy martyr Stephen" (Acts xxi: 20). (2) "In those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr" (Rev. ii: 13). (3) "The martyrs of Jesus" (Rev. xvii: 6).
(a) In the temple at Jerusalem, during the reign of Josiah (B. C. 878). (A chest provided with a slit to allow coals to enter was placed near the altar.) (2 Kings xii: 9).
(b) For the repair of the temple which had been deserted during the late usurpation, and in part mutilated to furnish materials for the house of Baal (2 Chr. xxiv: 7).
(c) But Jehoida, the priest, took a chest and bored a hole in the lid of it and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of the Lord" (2 Kings xii: 9).
"and at the king's command they made a chest and set it without at the gate of the house of the Lord" (2 Chr. xxiv: 8).
To Nathaniel (St. Bartholomew.) Bartholomew is commonly identified with Nathanael on the following grounds: The name Bartholomew Bartholmai, is a son of Tholomai, is a patronymic like Bar Jona, Barnabas, etc. Nathanael was brought to Jesus by Philip and in three of the lists of the Apostles, Philip and Bartholomew are coupled together, as though they were connected by some close bond. Nathanael was present with the other Apostles when our Lord appeared at the sea of Tiberias after His resurrection.
The evangelists who mention Bartholomew do not mention Nathanael, and St. John who mentions Nathanael does not mention Bartholomew. Bartholomew's call is nowhere recorded, but Nathanael's is given with the same detail as that of an Apostle.

1. "Nathanael of Cana in Galilee." (St. John, xxi: 2).
2. Nathanael answered and said unto him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel. (St. John i: 49).
3. Philip findeth Nathanael and saith unto him "we have found him," etc. . . . "come and see."
The Apostles Andrew and Peter, James and John and Philip, were disciples, probably, of St. John Baptist.
4. Jesus saw Nathanael, and said unto him, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." (St. John i: 47).
5. Nathanael was one of the seven disciples to whom our Lord showed Himself on that beautiful morning on the shore of the sea of Tiberias. (St. John, xxi: 1-4).
6. Being one of the eleven Apostles (St. Matt. xxviii: 16). He was of course present on Mt. Olivet when the Lord ascended—Recorded—(St. Mark xvi: 19, 20; St. Luke xxiv: 48-50; Acts i: 7, 32. D. O. McDougall, Long Reach, N. B.

PRIZE BIBLE QUESTIONS.—No. 19. 1. What two female disciples took part in the work of evangelization at Rome?
2. Whose reign is memorable for his faithful efforts to restore the worship of Jehovah?
3. By whom, and to whom were thorns and briars used as instruments of punishment?
Scripture Character, No. 7.—To what person do the following statements refer, and where are the facts recorded? 1. She was the pious wife of a Levite. 2. She was unhappy in her husband's home. 3. She made a vow to God which she faithfully fulfilled. 4. She answered meekly to a false accusation. 5. She was the mother of four sons and two daughters. 6. One of her sons was a famous judge, who died at the age of ninety-eight, honored and lamented by all.

A MOMENT'S REFLECTION is all you need when a perfectly plain proposition is made to you. When a woman's convinced she's right, she willingly goes ahead. Many subjects will bear a good deal of discussion, but the point we wish to emphasize particularly calls for no excessive use of words. We refer to a large purchase we have just made of a Bankrupt Stock of Ladies' Full Fashioned (summer weight) Black Cashmere Stockings.

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SEMON FOR TRINITY SUNDAY.

By H. Goodwin, D. D., Lord Bishop of Carlisle.

GOSPEL. "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from Heaven, even the Son of man which is in Heaven."—St. John iii: 13.

Nicodemus, of whom we read in the Gospel, was one of the most interesting of all characters, namely an honest and humble seeker after truth. It will, perhaps, assist us in examining the lessons to be learnt from the story of the interview of Nicodemus with our Lord, if it be noticed by the way that we read of him three times in the gospel of St. John. In the first place, we read of him in that passage which has been chosen for the gospel of Trinity Sunday, and concerning this event in the life of Nicodemus I shall have more to say presently: just now, it is sufficient to observe that it is clear, not only that Nicodemus was honest and humble, but that he possessed two opposite qualities, namely: courage and timidity. It was a courageous thing to put his dignity on one side, and to approach the new and almost unknown teacher in humble fashion, and, although a master in Israel himself, to accept the place of a scholar. Not many masters in Israel would have done this. On the other hand, there was unquestionable timidity. He dared not to come, except under the cover of night. Had he come by day every one would have known of the visit. Many would have blamed him, some would have laughed at him: all would have expressed surprise. The conduct of Nicodemus was, like so many things done in this world, a mixture of different qualities: courage and timidity each had its part.

The second notice of Nicodemus occurs in the seventh chapter, where we read of his saying a word in defence of our Lord in council. These chief priests and Pharisees had sent officers to take the Lord, and these had returned without Him. They had been so struck by the Lord's manner of speech that they dared not lay hands upon Him, though they had been sent out for the express purpose of taking Him into custody. This was intolerable; and the Pharisees scolded the officers, using very strong language, as they were likely to do. Then out spake Nicodemus, who was one of them, bolder now than he was when he came to Jesus by night, but still apparently suffering from constitutional timidity. He cannot shrink from taking the right side, but he seems to quiver as he does so. He contents himself with asking himself the pertinent question, "Doth our law judge any man before he hear him, and know that what he doeth?" He does not boldly take the side of Jesus and declare himself to be one of His disciples—that would have been too much; but he asks a general question which no one cares to answer, and which does its work by breaking up the assembly and sending every one to his own home. In the second appearance of Nicodemus we may see distinct marks of growth, and of improvement upon what he was when he came to Jesus by night.

But Nicodemus appears once more in the history, and this time the growth of his character is still more decided. On this occasion he said nothing, but he did much. We read in the nineteenth chapter of the gospel that, when the Lord had been crucified, Nicodemus was one of those who did honor to Him in His death. He brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pounds weight, for the purpose of embalming His body; he did not know, any more than the rest of the disciples, that His flesh could see no corruption, and therefore needed not to be embalmed; but it is just in this ignorance of the Lord's true nature, and the consequent impossibility of anticipating the glorious resurrection and ascension; that the chief brightness of the faith and love of Nicodemus is to be found. To his mind the chief priests and Pharisees, his companions in the council, had won the victory—the Lord was crucified, the Lord was dead, they had triumphed over Him, yet in this apparent defeat and humiliation, Nicodemus will not, cannot be unfaithful. The words which he had heard long ago, other words which he had heard from time to time, though not recorded by St. John, were spirit and life, though He who spoke them was now lying dead. It was a disappointment, no doubt, to see Him who they thought should have redeemed Israel lying helpless, unable to save either His country or Himself. But still his words had been full of wisdom and power. His life had been full of love and gentle deeds, the great things which He spake must somehow be true: and, therefore, even in this night of disappointment and sorrow, Nicodemus will still be a faithful disciple; nay, he will be a better disciple than ever. Timidity to the winds: this is a time for courage, and for sifting the wheat from the chaff; and therefore the crisis of apparent weakness and undeniable shame which might have driven away a poor half-hearted disciple, had the effect of bracing up Nicodemus' nerves, and making him come out bravely as the friend and disciple of Him who had died in shame upon the cross.

This little reference to the three historical notices of the disciple "who came to Jesus by night"—for St. John never mentions Nicodemus without reciting this feature of his discipleship—may give additional interest to the interview which Jesus was pleased to grant him. He was evidently one whom the Lord took pains to teach—one who was, in a certain sense, worth teaching. He came to Jesus to learn something concerning Him and His doctrine. Now, what did he learn. Perhaps, before dealing with this question, it may be well to ask another, namely, this—what did Nicodemus already know? It must be remembered that he was by no means an ignorant man, but one who may be described as professionally well taught—well learned in all such wisdom as was current among the Jews of his time. He was a doctor of the law, a master in Israel; and, as such, he knew all that God had taught His people

in the olden times. Speaking generally, you may say that what you find in the Old Testament Nicodemus knew. I dare say he knew, in a certain way, much that is not there; the learned Jews as you may see from several references made by our Lord in the gospels, and as we know from other sources, added much by their speculations and ingenious decisions to the revelation which the Old Testament contains. Nevertheless, the knowledge of God which may be gathered from the Old Testament was really what Nicodemus had. To speak the language of the day, he was acquainted with the First Person in the blessed Trinity or, to use that of the Creed, he believed in "God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth." But he was evidently not entirely satisfied with this knowledge; at all events, he did not think that in the revelations made to his fathers in olden time God had spoken His last words to mankind. Perhaps it would have been strange if He had done so; certainly there were many in his day who were on the tiptoe of expectation that God was about to speak again. You will remember how we read of devout people "waiting for the kingdom of God," of the Pharisees sending to John the Baptist to know if he was the Christ, of John the Baptist himself sending from his prison to ask the Lord whether He was the Messiah who should come, and how even the Samaritan woman at the well said, "I know that the Messiah cometh." These and such like indications show us what was in the mind of thoughtful persons in our Lord's time; and Nicodemus proves by the words which he spoke when he came to Jesus by night that his mind, as we might have expected, was affected in the same way: "Rabbi, we know that Thou art a Teacher come from God, for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him." I do not see any evidence in these words that Nicodemus recognized Jesus as the Christ. Evidently he did not realize the whole doctrine of our Lord's being and character, but he was on the right road to knowledge. He was not prevented by prejudice from coming to Jesus and calling Him "Rabbi," and acknowledging the powers which He displayed, and so he was in the best position for receiving new knowledge in addition to that which he already had.

This being the condition of Nicodemus with regard to knowledge, let us observe what it was that he learned from our Lord. Speaking with reference to the special character of this festival, I think that we may say that he learned the great doctrine of the blessed Trinity. Of course, the doctrine was not placed before his mind in the compact and concise form in which we find it in the Apostles' creed; in fact, it was not put forward as a doctrine or dogma at all; but, in reality, the truth concerning the mystery of the Trinity may be more easy for us to seize upon, when it comes before us in the informal manner in which it is formulated in a creed of the church, or discussed in a volume of learned divinity; anyhow, the more precise and formal statement of the doctrine receives illumination from such informal and incidental presentations, as that which we find in the conversation which took place between Nicodemus and our blessed Lord. The peculiarity, or, at all events, one peculiarity of this conversation was, that our Lord took Nicodemus at once to the consideration of the power of the Holy Ghost. The Lord's first utterance is that a man must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, which, when misunderstood by Nicodemus, was explained to mean that a man must be born of water and the Spirit. It is not necessary to enter upon a full discussion of the meaning of our Lord's word; it is sufficient to notice that the operation of the Spirit is the chief point of them. The need of being born of the Spirit, regenerated by the power of the Holy Ghost, the mysterious reality of this spiritual change—these are the chief features of the Lord's discourse. I dare not speak positively as to the reasons which led Him to adopt this method, but I note that He seems to have assumed that His teaching ought not to have been altogether new and strange to Nicodemus. A master in Israel ought to have known something concerning the spirit of God, of which he could read so much in his own sacred books. The spirit of God had moved upon the face of the waters in the primeval chaos; the spirit of God had striven with man in the days before the flood; the spirit of God had been recognized throughout the whole history of the ancient church as resting upon men and influencing their spirits; consequently there might be, and doubtless there was, much wisdom in leading up from the Spirit to the Son, instead of from the Son to the Spirit, as it seems so much more natural to do. Anyhow, our Lord did begin His teaching to Nicodemus by asserting the supreme need to man of being born again by the power of the Holy Ghost. And, having thus brought two persons in the blessed Trinity, the Lord finally presents Himself as the completion of the revelation of God. Just notice the words of my text, for they are very striking: "No man has ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

The words look as though they could not have been actually spoken at the time, but must have assumed their present form after our Lord's ascension. No doubt it does seem difficult to understand how our Lord, when actually speaking to Nicodemus on earth, could have spoken of Himself as being in heaven. I cannot go fully into this difficulty, but I would have you to observe that beyond all doubt our Lord was pleased to give Nicodemus an unusually clear intimation of His divine character and being. Nothing short of this would have been suitable to the occasion. Nicodemus was already a disciple: he had risked much to come and declare himself. He began his conversation with the Lord by saying,

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"We know that Thou art a Teacher come from God, for no man can do the miracles which Thou doest except God be with Him." Therefore for the Lord merely to have recognized Nicodemus as a disciple on this basis would have been to leave him where he was, and I should imagine that St. John would scarcely have thought it worth while to chronicle the interview. The whole point of the story is that Jesus revealed Himself with unwonted clearness. It was, as I apprehend, in consequence of this unwonted clearness that St. John, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, was led to record the revelation which Jesus Christ was pleased to make. And whatever may be the difficulty concerning the actual language employed, no one can doubt that Christ declared Himself to have come from heaven, that He gave an intimation of His passion on the Cross, and that He revealed the great mystery of the love of God which sent His only begotten Son into the world, that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." Consequently, to us the discourse of our Lord to Nicodemus may be regarded as a declaration of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. We have God the Father sending His only begotten Son, and causing those whom His Son has redeemed to be born again by the operation of the Holy Ghost. Nothing can be more distinct; and there is this great advantage in this form of declaration of doctrine, that it comes from the very lips of Him who alone could speak on this subject with authority. It is no conclusion by argument, no subtle deduction from other theological premises, but the immediate utterance of Him who, though in human form, could speak of Himself as having "come down from heaven." Shall we take up the doubting language of Nicodemus, and say concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, "How can these things be?" Or shall we not rather say, "I believe in God the Father, who made me and all the world; in God the Son, who redeemed me and all mankind; and in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifies me and all the elect people of God?" So much for the manner in which the great mystery of godliness was made known to Nicodemus. Now let me endeavor to draw from the history the character and the experience of Nicodemus a few hints as to the manner in which we should accept this same great mystery. In the first place, perhaps every christian disciple may be described as "coming to Jesus by night." I do not mean that we are all of us deterred by timidity or shame from declaring ourselves to be His disciples. I should trust that in this sense we should be ashamed to be like Nicodemus but I mean that we are by nature in the dark concerning divine things. Christ is "the light of the world;" and when we get into His presence the darkness flees and the true light shines. Outside all is dark, and we must press from darkness to light. But besides this, the thought of coming to Jesus by night may suggest to us the thought of the intellectual difficulties which lie in the way of apprehending the true doctrine of the Holy Trinity. It is often said that the doctrine is an obscure and hard one. Some men dislike it, even kick at it, saying, "How can these things be?" It always has been so, it is not, it will always be. Men do not like to come to Christ by night; and perhaps in times like our own, in which the light of human knowledge shines so brightly, men are more disposed than they were in simpler

ages to object to the admission that they are in any sense in the dark. Nevertheless, it is true that God is a God who hideth Himself, and though He is light, and has caused light to shine upon the world through His Son, still there is much that no human eye can see, and much that no human mind can know. There must be darkness in this present imperfect dispensation. But "the night is far spent, the day is at hand." In the day which is coming we shall see God, and shall know Him, even as we are known. Perhaps, also, we may learn from the experience of Nicodemus how that God in this world reveals Himself more and more clearly to those who humbly seek Him. Nothing can be more striking and more interesting than that gradual growth of faith in Nicodemus, on which I have already commented. Ever timid, yet ever growing in courage; faint, it may be, yet pursuing; knowing in Whom he had believed, though apparently believing, as it were, by stealth, and hiding his light rather than making it shine before men. I do not think that Nicodemus was by any means a specimen of the perfect disciple. He was not the man to leave all and follow Christ, like Peter and James and John. So far as we know, he never did become a preacher of Christ to his brethren. But, perhaps, on this very account, there may be all the more for an average disciple to learn from him in our own days. And those who are disposed to learn may gather from his experience, that he who has once known the power of Jesus and the doctrine of the Spirit cannot very easily be driven out of his knowledge. He may find difficulty in bringing his knowledge to perfection; natural timidity, or weakness, or tendency to doubt and hesitate, may prevent him from being what he feels that he ought to be. Still, if he perseveres, watching in prayer, putting on the whole armor of God, he may hope to grow in grace as Nicodemus did, and so, if not a conspicuous disciple, to be at least a true one, and as such to be admitted to the joy of His Lord, when the day breaks and the shadows of night have all fled away. Father, Son and Spirit. Give praise to Him who built the hills; Give praise to Him the streams who fills; Give praise to Him who lights each star That sparkles in the blue afar. Give praise to Him who wakes the morn, And bids it glow with beams new-born: Who draws the shadows of the night, Like curtains, o'er our wearied sight. Give praise to Him whose love has given, In Christ His Son, the life of heaven: Who for our darkness gives us light, And turns to day our deepest night. Give praise to Him who sheds abroad Within our hearts the love of God: The spirit of all truth and peace, The fount of joy and holiness: To Father, Son, and Spirit, now The hands we lift, the knees we bow: To Thee, eternal God, we raise Our humble, fervent song of praise. —Horatius Bonar. Let Us Pray. O God, our Father, who in Thy love to our race didst send Thy Son into our world, to brist back the wandering sheep, turn away Thy face from us, but cleanse us from our secret faults, and mercifully forgive our presumptuous sins, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Benediction. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God our Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with us all, now and evermore. Amen.