The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1876.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, *November 12th*, 1876.—Saul's early Ministry.—Acts ix. 19–30.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vs. 20–22.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"He which persecuted us in times past, now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed." Galatians i. 22.

DAILY READINGS.—*Monday*, Galatians i. 1–24. *Tuesday*, 2 Corinthians xi. 30–33. *Wednesday*, Acts xxii. 1–22. *Thursday*, Acts iv. 34–37. *Friday*, Joshua ii. *Saturday*, John xii. 20–26. *Sunday*, Philippians iii. 4–11.

ANALYSIS.—*I. Labors at Damascus.* Vs. 19–22. *II. Flight from Damascus.* Vs. 23–25. *III. Arrival at Jerusalem.* Vs. 26–29. *IV. Departure from Jerusalem.* Vs. 30.

SAUL'S CONVERSION.—Saul had a thorough acquaintance with the traditions, customs and prejudices of Judaism; had a high social and official position confided to him by his countrymen; had treasures of rich and varied learning, accumulated from numerous sources. Humanly speaking, he was the favorite of his times—"*the coming man.*" He had, as we should say, "everything to lose, and nothing to gain," in stopping right at the climax of his growing favor with his people to become a disciple and advocate of the new religion which they almost universally opposed. His conversion, therefore, cannot be accounted for either on the ground of personal advantage or of an excited imagination. This was what he himself, in many ways and on many occasions, affirmed. Galatians i. 1–16.

EXPOSITION.—*I. Saul at Damascus. Verse* 19.—Our last lesson left the converted Saul restored to sight from his three day's blindness, baptized into the Lord Jesus, and refreshed in spirit. For three days he had been fasting. *When he had received meat, he was strengthened, i. e.*, in body. The fast, together with the mental excitement, had tended to his exhaustion. *Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.* He had not thus far been "*of* them," but now *came among them.* "became" one with them, being introduced by Ananias, whose testimony, with Saul's assurance and bearing, evidently satisfied them and set them at rest. With no other disciples had he ever yet been thus associated, and his purpose had been to be "*with*" the *Jewish* authorities, and to deal with these disciples quite otherwise—even as he had with those at "Jerusalem." Hence there is a certain emphasis to be given to the words, "*with the* [in] *Damascus disciples.*" He was "with" them not only as an associate, but as a fellow-laborer (vs. 20). He did not look to them for his messages, as he informs us in Gal. i. 11, 12.

Verse 20.—*And straightway.* Or at once, after his baptism—not after the "certain days." See above, on verse 19. *He preached.*—Or, literally, *was heralding*—proceeded to announce as a herald, on the customary invitation to strangers. xiii. 15. Several Greek words are translated *preach.* One of the most common is that from which comes our word "evangelize," which means to tell glad tidings. *Christ.* The best authorities give *Jesus* instead of "Christ," as the true reading—the very word originally written by Luke. Most hateful to the Jews—designating, as it did, *that Nazarene. That he is the Son of God.* That is the lofty title which the expected Messiah and King of the Jews was to bear.

Verse 21.—*All that heard him were amazed.* All the unbelieving, hostile, synagogue Jews, to and for whom he heralded that hated name and doctrine. The word translated *amazed* is the same as that translated "bewitched" in our Lesson on Simon. viii. 9. *Is not this he that destroyed.* Both parties had been expecting and awaiting his arrival, but with what opposite feelings! The completeness, the greatness, the suddenness of the change, confounded them at first. They may even have questioned whether it were genuine—whether he was not playing a deep game in order the better to gain his end. *That he might bring them.* These very men whom he is helping. *Chief priests.* The Sanhedrim, thus named from its chief constituents.

Verse 22.—*But Saul.* As contrasted with his amazed hearers. *Increased the more in strength.* Refers, not to the body, but to preaching and its consequent influence. *He was gaining more and more in power.* The truth became daily more and more clear to view, and he gained facility and effectiveness in his mode of putting and applying it. *Confounded the Jews.* Saul was thoroughly versed in Biblical and Rabbinical learning, was a powerful logician, knew thoroughly and had himself used the arguments of the Jews against Christianity; and had also heard and left the power of the opposing arguments, especially as employed by Stephen, whose method Saul subsequently, and probably at this time, very closely followed. Compare xiii. 6–43 with xiii. 2–50.

Verse 23.—*After that many days were fulfilled.* Paul gives the explanation in Gal. 16–18, which shows that he went into Arabia—what part is not told or known—and there remained three years, which may have been, according to the Jewish mode of statement, either three full years, or one full year and some part of both the preceding and the following years; that he then and there returned to Damascus, and again preached Jesus to his countrymen. *Took counsel.* After his return from Arabia, and because he again took to preaching. The authorities of the different synagogues doubtless combined, and, as we learn from 1 Cor. xi. 32, secured the co-operation of the civil authorities, since Damascus was at this time under Aretas, king of Arabia, whom the Jews favored, and doubtless for the reason that they in turn were favored by him.

Verse 25.—*Took by night.* He had hidden himself from their wrath (vs. 25), and only under cover of night could he escape. *By the wall in a basket.* See 2 Cor. xi. 33. "Houses built against, upon, or overhanging the wall of a city, are still to be seen a Damascus."

II. Saul at Jerusalem. Verse 26.—*Assayed.* Attempted. He had fled from Damascus in secrecy and haste, and probably unattended, with no such show of force as that which went with him thither three years before. *They were all afraid of him.* They had doubtless heard of his professed change, and his preaching in the synagogues for a short time, just after his conversion, but probably not of his return to Damascus after the Arabian exile.

Verse 27.—*But Barnabas took him,* etc. Says Knox: "Why Barnabas? Barnabas was from Cyprus, Cyprus was not far from Tarsus. Barnabas may have been at school at Tarsus. He and Saul may have been acquainted before. There is an ancient tradition that they studied together at the school of Gamaliel. . . . Barnabas was a kind-hearted and generous man, too; for he had sold his lands, and brought the money for the disciples to use." But whether previously acquainted or not, they were for several years after this most intimately associated as fellow-laborers in the ministry of the Gospel.

Verse 29.—*He spake boldly,* etc. Or, more literally, *em*boldening himself in the name of the Lord. *The Grecians, i. e.*, the foreign-born, Greek-speaking Jews, like himself, to whom, therefore, he would have most ready access, on account of both his being of them and his command of their language. *But they went about to slay him.* Probably the Hellenists themselves did this, though they were certain to be urged on by the more hardened Sanhedrists and their associates.

Verse 30.—*Which when the brethren knew.* "The brethren" has here an exclusive reference to Christians. It implies what the reference in Gal. i. 11–24 would suggest as probable, that even at the outset, and in the very city where Peter and James were at work, Saul acted independently, and would not "build on another man's foundation." *Tarsus.* His native city, and "the capital of Cilicia, with a literary reputation rivaling that of Athens and Alexandria."

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 19. What was Saul's purpose at first in going to Damascus? He is now among the disciples as a friend; what has brought this change of feeling about? For what did Paul count all things loss? Phil. iii. 7, 8; compare John xii. 25.

Vs. 20. What right had Paul to be heard in the Jewish synagogues? Acts xiii. 15.

Vs. 21. What made the amazement of the Jews very natural? Is it not better to break away at once from the impenitent than to follow them to ruin? Psalm i.

Vs. 22. In Paul's addresses to the Jews, what does he seem most anxious to prove? What comparison did he probably make? What is the meaning of "Christ"? Of "Jesus"? Of "Jesus Christ" John iv. 25. Matt. i. 12.

Vs. 23. Where did Paul go on his first departure from Damascus? Why did he seek this retirement? Did he return to Damascus again?

Vs. 25. How did Paul escape from the rage of the Jews? Who escaped in the same way from Jericho? Josh. ii. 15. Was it right thus to flee? Matt. x. 23.

Vs. 26. How long had Saul been absent from Jerusalem? Gal. i. 17.

Vs. 27. Who was Barnabas? Chap. iv. 36, 37. To whom did he bring Paul? Gal. i. 18, 19.

Vs. 30. Where was Cesarea? Why did Paul go there? Where was Tarsus? —*Baptist Teacher.*

SUNDAY, *November 19th*, 1876.—Dorcas Restored to Life.—Acts ix. 31–43.

YOUTHS' DEPARTMENT.

Go, because it rains.

"I suppose that you won't go to Sabbath-school to-day, Lucy," said a mother, one stormy Sabbath, settling herself to some reading after breakfast.

"Please let me go to-day, mamma; I want to go because it rains."

"Why, Lucy, that is my excuse for staying at home. How can you make it a reason for going?"

"Our teacher always goes, mamma, in all weather, although she lives so far away. She is often obliged to hire a carriage to bring her; and she told the class that one Sabbath, when she went through the storm, and did not find even one scholar, she was so discouraged that she couldn't help crying. She asked us, too, if we did not go to our day-schools when it rained harder; and she said, while we must always do as our parents thought best, perhaps if we asked them pleasantly to let us go, and were willing to wear our thick boots and water-proofs, they would be willing, if we were well. Please let me go to-day, mamma; you know if it rains ever so much worse to-morrow, I shall go to school to keep my place in my class."

"Well, I am willing, my dear, if you wear your school suit; go and get ready." But when the mother heard Lucy singing softly in the nursery, as she dressed herself to go out—

Must Jesus bear the cross alone,
And all the world go free?

she could no longer take interest in her book. When her husband, who was a lawyer, came in soon after, from his library, she said, smiling—

"Our Lucy is going to Sabbath-school especially because it rains, that her teacher may be encouraged by the presence of at least one pupil. What say you to going to church ourselves for the same reason, if not for a better?"

"I'm agreed, my love. I was just thinking I could never plead a cause to a vacant court-room, and that our minister must find it hard work to preach to empty pews."

In the dark.

Baby Jennie had been away from her home a long time—a week is a long time to a baby; she was very good and happy, while visiting with her mamma, but she missed the dear home faces, no doubt.

When she and her mamma reached the depot, on their return home, Baby's grandpa was there to meet them.

The platform was quite dark to little Jennie, as she was lifted down from the car; but when her grandpa spoke to her, although she could not see him, she sprang into his arms at the sound of his voice.

In the dark the little one knew and trusted the loving call of her guardian: is not this a sweet lesson of faith for us, dear children?

You do not know yet how often, as you go on in life, you will hear our Father's voice calling you *in the dark.*

I mean, you will be called to take some step onward—called to some act of duty and obedience—when you cannot see or know the reasons, when all seems dark and strange.

Then you will need Baby Jennie's faith. If you are sure it is your heavenly Father's voice that bids you go forward, he will not suffer you to fail.

"When we cannot see the way,
Let us trust, and still obey."

You will surely know his voice in the dark, if now in your young, bright, happy hours you always listen to it gladly and dutifully.

Listen when he speaks to you through your conscience, by his ministers, or his Holy Word.

Listen always, as little Samuel did, saying, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Then, when the dark days come, as the Bible says: "Thine ear shall hear a voice saying unto thee: This is the way." And you will be comforted, for you will know that voice.

And when you come to the "dark valley of the shadow of death," oh, how gladly will you hear that Father's voice! How joyfully will you trust yourself in his arms, to be borne through the darkness into everlasting life!—*Churchman.*

Miss Rachel's Bonnet.

"I wonder if Miss Rachel means to wear that old bonnet again this winter?" said one youthful teacher to another, as a lady, plainly attired, walked in and took her seat before the Bible-class.

"She is really growing miserly?" said her friend. "With her ample means, to appear as she does is absurd; that old satin dress has been in use as long as I can remember, and as for the bonnet, it has been altered and trimmed half a dozen times. I really would like to to know what she does with her money."

Just then a little hand pulled the teacher's shawl, and a little face all aflush with earnestness and reproof looked into those of the young ladies:

"Please don't speak so about Miss Rachel, teacher. She sent us a ton of coal this week, and she bought my sick brother a chair with wheels, and she helps lots of folks besides us."

The bell rang, and the opening exercises began. Miss Rachel, in her plain bonnet, joined heartily in them all; the blessing was on her that comes to those who let not their left hand know what the ir right hand does. The teachers who had called her miserly felt some pricks of conscience.—*S. S. Times.*

Hard Work.

"What is your secret?" asked a lady of Turner, the distinguished painter. He replied, "I have no secret, madam, but hard work." Says Dr. Arnold, "The difference between one man and another is not so much in talent as in energy." "Nothing," says Reynolds, "is denied well-directed labor, and nothing is to be attained without it." "Excellence in any department," says Johnson, "can now be obtained by the labor of a lifetime, but is not to be purchased at a lesser price." "There is but one method," says Sidney Smith, "and that is hard labor; and a man who will not pay that price for distinction had better at once dedicate himself to the pursuit of the fox." "Step by step," reads the French proverb, "one goes very far." "Nothing," says Mirabeau, is impossible to the man who can will. This is the only law of success." Have you ever entered a cottage, ever travelled in a coach, ever talked with a peasant in the field or loitered with a mechanic at the loom," asked Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, "and not found that each of these men had a talent you had not, knew something you knew not?" The most useless creature that ever yawned at a club, or idled in rags under the sun of Calabria, has no excuse for want of intellect. What men want is, not talent, but purpose; in other words, not the power to achieve, but the will to labor.

Is Licensing evils right?

The theory of selecting a popular evil and attempting to raise a revenue from it is wrong in principle and dangerous in practice. Evils should be suppressed, not licensed for gain. The object of government is protection, not to the few who are willing to become partners in the evil, alone, but to all its subjects. The sale of alcohol causes an incalculable amount of crime and misery; an element of destruction which, if continued to be made legal and respectable by license, must destroy the subjects of government itself. If alcohol, sugar-coated or straight, is really necessary to the human family, then let us have it as free and cheap as possible. If, on the other hand, it is a destructive outlaw, which never has nor never can be controlled either by individuals or government, then let us begin at the other end—treat it as you would a wolf in the sheep-fold; make its presence evidence of evil intent; wherever it is exposed for sale for drink, throw it into the gutter. Better, much better, see it run in the gutter than into men, and have the police find *them* in the gutter, and drag them through the streets to the lock-up to be fined and imprisoned because they are not able to stand all the poison government agents are authorized to sell them. We can never reach this evil until the man who sells liquor is locked up just as quickly as the horse thief or murderer! Selling intoxicating drinks causes nine-tenths of the murders and thefts which our courts punish. It is cheaper and better to lock up the man who sells than the man who drinks. We must do one thing or the other.—*California Agriculturist.*

SHALL WOMEN PREACH?—This question now agitates the Methodist body rather more than the Presbyterians are moved by the question of woman's "speaking in meeting." Miss Anna Oliver is the cause of said agitation. She is a graduate of the Methodist Seminary at Boston, and after her graduation applied for admission into the ministry. She was refused. Nothing daunted, she determined to preach if she could find any one to hear. In that she had no difficulty. For some time she had been preaching in the First Place Methodist Church of Brooklyn, "to very large audiences." A large number of her hearers offered to form an independent church, and call her to the pastorate. She declined the offer, stating that it was her intention again to apply for admission into the ranks of the ministry. Miss Oliver is described as a modest, intelligent young lady, and a very pleasant speaker.—*Examiner and Chronicle.*

On Sunday, August 6th, near Cairo, Egypt, the ceremony of opening the Nile took place in the presence of the principal Ministers and officials and a concourse of several thousand persons. This ceremony is held when the river attains a certain height. An opening is cut to admit its fertilizing waters to the numerous canals spread all over Lower Egypt. The effigy of a woman in gorgeous apparel, and bedecked with jewelry, is floated down the stream, and money is distributed to the natives present in token of the riches and abundance that will result wherever the Nile flows.

The *Hornet* is responsible for the following bit of gossip about one of Rome's richest and most recent converts:—"The Marquis of Bute must be rather troublesome to the priests of his new faith. When the decorations for the church which he is building were submitted to him he found that 'the Book of Saints' had supplied the principal ones for sculptures. 'Who are these persons?' he asked. 'The saints,' replied the architect. 'Don't know them,' said the Marquis. 'I will have no saints in my chapel that are not in the Bible.'"

Never harbor animosity toward a friend for a mere hasty expression. Forgiveness is a God-like quality, and a true friend is so scarce that he should not be repudiated on slight grounds; but those who injure you from "malice prepense" should be shunned as you would avoid a tiger.

A Scotchman, being examined by his minister, was asked, "What kind of a man was Adam?" "Oh, jist like ither folk." The minister insisted on having a more special description of the first man, and pressed for more explanation. "Weel," said the catechumen, "he was jist like Joe Simpon, the horse-couper." "How so?" asked the minister. "Well, naebody got onything by him, and many lost."

An old farmer says of his boys: "From sixteen to twenty they knew more than I did; at twenty-five they knew as much; at thirty they were willing to hear what I had to say; at thirty-five they asked my advice; and I think when they are forty they will acknowledge that the old man knows something."

Patched up friendship seldom becomes whole again.