

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, November 11th, 1877.—Paul before Agrippa.—Acts xxvi. 6-20.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 15-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.”—Acts xxvi. 19.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxiv. 26, 27; Chap. xxv. Tuesday, Acts xxvi. 1-20. Wednesday, vs. 6; Jeremiah xxxiii. 14-26. Thursday, vs. 8; Matt. xxviii. 1-15. Friday, vs. 17; Ephesians iii. 1-21. Saturday, vs. 18; Isaiah xxxv. Sunday, vs. 20; 2 Chronicles xxxiii.

ANALYSIS.—I. Paul's present belief. Vs. 6-8. II. His past persecutions. Vs. 9-11. III. His conversion. Vs. 12-15. VI. His divine commission. Vs. 16-18. V. His obedience to God's will. Vs. 19, 20.

QUESTIONS.—How long was Paul imprisoned in Caesarea? Into what kind of custody did Felix commit Paul? Who succeeded Felix? What did the Jews request Festus to do? Chap. xxv. 2. To what is the trial now transferred? What desire of Paul (chap. xix. 21) and what promise of the Lord (xxiii. 11) are thus to be fulfilled?

Vs. 6. How does Paul express the idea that his faith was to be found in the Old Testament?

Vs. 7. What does the resurrection of Jesus prove concerning the Messiah?

Vs. 8. How do the Jews treat the evidence of Christ's resurrection? Matt. xxviii. 13.

Vs. 9. Was Paul sincere? How, then, was his act culpable? How did he afterward regard it? 1 Cor. xv. 9.

Vs. 10. Was Stephen the only martyr in the first persecution?

Vs. 12. Name some things stated in this description of Paul's conversion (vs. 12-18) not stated in chap. ix. 3-16? Is there any contradiction?

Vs. 15. What proof does Paul have of Christ's resurrection?

Vs. 18. What does Paul say are the aims of his ministry?

Vs. 19. What evidence does Paul give that his conversion was genuine?

Vs. 20. Where does Paul say he first preached? What does he say he preached?

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—Felix postponed further inquiry into Paul's case until Lysias came down. We read nothing, however, of his so coming, nor of any further judicial proceedings on the part of Felix. Thus, Paul remained in imprisonment, though treated with kindness and consideration, and the cruel suspense continued two years (A. D. 56-61). All positive information is denied to us concerning the employment of the apostle thus imprisoned. His was military custody. The administration of Felix became more and more unpopular, for which he was summoned to Rome and Festus came to take the command of the province. Felix had been coarse and cruel; Festus seems to be honorable and just. He would not accede to the request made to him when in Jerusalem by the Jews for Paul's surrender to the Sanhedrim for trial, their real purpose, doubtless, being to assassinate him in the road. See chap. xxv. 16. The accused, Festus said, must have the accuser face to face, and that in Caesarea. Having visited Jerusalem and returned, followed immediately by the accusers of Paul, Festus took his seat on the judicial tribunal, and ordered Paul to be brought. The Jews renewed their charge, classed under three heads as before, heresy, sacrilege, and treason (Acts xxv. 8): (1) the law; (2) the temple; (3) against Caesar. Festus himself is now in perplexity. Not wishing to lose the favor of the Jews, he proposed to Paul that he should go to Jerusalem, there to be tried in his presence or protection. But Paul saw what danger lurked in this proceeding; and knowing what rights he had, not as a Jew, but as a Roman citizen, he appealed unto Caesar. By these potent words, “I appeal unto Caesar,” Paul transferred his case at once to the supreme tribunal of the emperor of Rome.

EXPOSITION.—The avowed reason why Festus called Paul to make this speech was to get material for his letter to the emperor (xxv. 21); the real reason was to gratify the curiosity of Agrippa (xxv. 22). Paul's aim was to defend and commend the gospel, he had nothing to fear or gain; but he could preach Christ by giving the narrative of his life. An introduction of singular grace and skill (vs. 2, 3) is followed by a brief reference

to those years of his life against which lay no charge (vs. 4, 5). Then, with our lesson, come (1) the nature of the charge against him; (2) the cause of this charge; namely, the Jewish spirit as originally shared by himself; (3) the remedy for this bad cause as exemplified in his miraculous conversion; (4) the fruits of this remedy in a faith and practice according to the word of God as given to Israel.

I. The Nature of the Charge. Verses 6, 7.—He says (vs. 6), “for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.” This “promise” is the great promise of the Old Testament; namely, the coming of Messiah. xiii. 32, 33; xxviii. 20. “The hope” of this is here not his hope of the fulfillment of the promise, since in his view its fulfillment had been accomplished, and hence was matter of faith and not hope. He, with his people, believed God's promise of Messiah, and his position now differed from theirs only in believing also God's testimony to its fulfillment. His reference to Israel as “the twelve tribes” (vs. 7; comp. James i. 1) regards the Israel of his time as made up of descendants from all the tribes. The word “our” expresses further his Hebrew heart, and recognizes Agrippa as a Jew. The earnest [instant] and continuous service of God (vs. 7) by sacrifices, etc. (comp. Luke ii. 37; 1 Tim. v. 5), had its chief motive and inspiration in the promise of Messiah, and thus far identified his life with the nation's, and should have prevented Jews from persecuting him.

II. The Cause of the Charge. Verses 8-11.—It was not in any lack of evidence that God's promise had been fulfilled in Jesus of the Nazarene, and hence that Paul was on the right ground, but in a wicked spirit which refused to receive this evidence. The resurrection of Christ by common consent, if admitted, proved him to be Messiah. On the question of his resurrection everything therefore turned.

The cause was a wicked spirit which once possessed even him [“I” in vs. 9 made very emphatic in Greek] as it still continued to possess his accusers. It was a blinding spirit (vs. 9), and hence to himself (but not to God) the wrong way seemed the right. Yet this seeming did not make wrong right, nor him right in doing wrong, for the mistake was a fruit of his own wrong, wicked spirit. vs. 11; 1 Cor. xv. 9, 10; Rom. vii. 7-25. The attempt to compel Christians to blaspheme was common in the persecutions of later times; “compelled,” in vs. 11, should be “was attempting to compel.”

III. The Remedy. Verses 12-18.—Parallel passages ix. 1-31; xxii. 1-21. His unbelief was changed by a change of that spirit which prompted it. The change was of God, and through Christ, and by the Holy Spirit—from the wrong to the right. If so, not he, but his accusers, are now wrong. If so they, not he, ought to be changed in spirit; and so in relation to Messiah—Israel's old time “hope.”

The several narratives of Paul's conversion differ, but are not contradictory. The attendants are represented in ix. 7 not as standing upon their feet, but rather as “staying”; that is, from their journey. The Greek allows this. The attendants also saw not a form, as Saul did, but the light; and they heard the voice as sound, but not to distinguish the words. The directions to Saul, in vs. 16-18, may in fact have been given through Ananias at Damascus, but being from Jesus, and a part of the purpose of the vision, they could in his speech be at once connected with the vision. Or they may have been twice given. “To kick against pricks,” was to keep up a course against God's will, which was both futile and painful, as the plowman with his goad stick pricked from behind the reluctant ox, which might kick; but every new kick would cause a new prick. His driver was his master. The work of God in Saul brought a work of God for Saul. God would use him for changing others in the same way; first, “the people”; that is, the Jews, vs. 17. and then “the Gentiles.” “that they may turn” that is, conversion [not “to turn them,”] the very hinge of all being faith in Jesus.

IV. The Fruits. Verse 19.—It was simple, faithful obedience, doing just the work given him, despite all dangers and all obstacles. He began at once in the very city where he had intended to

make arrests. ix. 19-31. A king, who was also a Jew, could well see that such obedience was right and necessary, and not a cause of blame. So were the Jews not more against Paul than against God. Vs. 21, 22.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, November 18th, 1877.—Almost Persuaded.—Acts xxvi. 21-29.

GOLDEN TEXT.—“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”—Acts xxvi. 28.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

When Paul had been in prison two years, a new governor, named Festus, was sent to take the place of Felix. He would not grant the request of the Jews, that Paul might be given up to them. But he asked Paul if he would go to Jerusalem, and be tried there by him. But Paul, who knew that the Jews meant to kill him, said he ought to be tried as a Roman, and added, “I appeal unto Caesar.” So Festus was obliged to keep him safely till he could send him to Rome, to be tried there by the emperor. Soon after this king Agrippa came to Caesarea, with his sister Bernice. Festus told Agrippa about his prisoner. So Festus invited the principal men of Caesarea, and ordered all the captains of a thousand soldiers to wait on him. King Agrippa and his sister also came, with great show. Festus said that this man having appealed unto Caesar, must be sent to Rome; and that he had brought him out now that he, with king Agrippa, might find out what to write. Then Agrippa told Paul that he might speak for himself. The apostle stretched out his hand, and said that he was happy to speak for himself before one who knew, as well as Agrippa did, all the customs of the Jews. He then told the story of his life, which you may read in the words of our Lesson.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.
DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XLV.—EXCHANGE OF NEWS.

Matthew and Hugh were in the lowest possible spirits all that Saturday, and could not by any means recover their equanimity. When tea-time came, Matthew felt so unequal to the task of discussing this affair with Dorothy again, that he said, “Instead of talkin' to-night again about what we meant to, we'd better put it off till Monday, Mrs. Dorothy Sharpe, and let the Sunday rest come between, which'll give us time to think.”

“Very well,” answered Dorothy, sullenly, as she sipped her tea. “So if you'd be good enough to look in on Monday,” said Matthew, “I desay we shall all have made up our minds what's the best thing to do.” Dorothy did not respond; but after silently finishing her tea, she wished the two a cold ‘good-night,’ and went her way.

All through the day Hugh had laboured in vain at producing the desired design for the manufacturer. He had no spirit for his word, and no inspiration of beauty filled his mind. At last he threw down his pencils in despair, and felt ready to cry.

“I must see what I can do on Monday,” he said, dejectedly, as he put aside his portfolio; “I can't do anything to-day.”

The next day after dinner he said, “I should like to go to the Mission School this afternoon, and see if Lisa's there, sir. I ought to tell her at once about grandmother: she has been so interested about her.”

“Go, my lad,” answered Matthew kindly. “Maybe it'll do ye good to talk it over with her: she's a wise little body in her way.”

“Are you going out, sir?” “No, not this afternoon, my boy. I'm fit for nothin' jest now but sittin' in quiet.”

“And while you're quiet here,” responded Hugh, “will you try to decide what we had better do?” “Ay, I'll think it over; but you must help to decide that,” said Matthew, listlessly.

Hugh had no doubt about what he ought to do: he knew that it was his duty to take care of his grandmother, although she had never done anything

for him in her life; equally it was his duty to be a help and comfort to Matthew, who had done everything for him since the day he had taken the boy in hand. How to do for both, agreeably to both; was the problem which he could not solve. Could Matthew and Dorothy be persuaded to live under the same roof, he asked, and if so, would peace dwell with them? If they would not consent to live in the same house, then to which of them must Hugh cling,—to his grandmother, or to Matthew? It would not affect her, he thought, to be left alone, if only she had sufficient allowed her to live upon; but he knew that it would half-kill Matthew were he to leave him,—and life to him without Matthew, and with his grandmother only, he felt would be unbearable. So, walking along to the Mission Hall, he decided that nothing should induce him to leave Matthew; but that he would endeavour to get him to agree that Dorothy should come and live with them in her old cottage.

After thus deciding, his mind grew quite calm, and his spirits rose a little. He found Lisa at the hall, and when the afternoon lessons were over, he went to her and said, with a politeness which was natural to him, “Good afternoon, Lisa, I've something to tell you, so will you let me walk home with you?”

“I shall be very glad, Hughie,” she answered; “but, I hope you haven't got any bad news. I don't think you have, else you'd look graver. So, tell me yours first, and then I'll tell you mine.”

Lisa had never liked Dorothy from the little she had seen of her, and she had long known that the old woman was no favourite of Matthew's and Hugh's. She felt, therefore, quite distressed to hear that she was the lad's eagerly-sought grandmother; and, when in winding up the story, he told her that he should try to get Matthew's consent for her to come and live with them in the country, Lisa remarked shrewdly. “Well, I was thinking, when you said you two was going to live in the country, that you'd be just a great deal too happy. For, oh, I'm sure, it must be like Paradise to live out in one of those pretty country cottages with anybody you love like you love Matthew Pedder, and that you can be at peace with; and have flowers growing in your garden, and the loveliest green hedges and fields all around. Oh, isn't it lovely? Miss Marnier have took me to Richmond, and about other green places once or twice, and you feel as if you've got a different life when you get out amongst country fields and lanes, where the air's so different to what it is here. Well, if Mrs. Sarah goes to live with you, it'll just keep you from being too contented with this world, else you might have got to be too satisfied with your Paradise, and gave up looking forward to a better.”

“That's true, Lisa,” said Hugh smiling down at her: he was now nearly a head taller than she. “I suppose,” he added, “we never get everything exactly to suit us in this world. I have always felt that if Mr. Pedder had been anything but a bird-seller, how perfectly happy I should have been with him. Now that circumstances are going to allow us to live in a beautiful village, I fear there will be something else to prevent the perfect happiness which seemed just within our reach. Poor grandmother's disposition is so peculiar, that I'm afraid we shall not be always at peace.”

“But you see,” answered Lisa, thoughtfully, “she will be more comfortable living with you, and that will help to make her more kind and gracious. People can't always be their best when they're anxious about daily bread, and living friendless and alone. Why, I know I've been a deal better-tempered and pleasanter since I've been living with somebody as cares for me and likes me.”

“But you didn't need much improving, Lisa,” said Hugh warmly; “you were always good-tempered, and pleasant, and nice, even when you were in your greatest trouble.”

A bright blush rose to Lisa's face at these words of praise, and after a few moments' silence, she said, “I'm glad you think so well of me, but I'm afraid it's more than I deserve. And I feel sure that I shan't be always good-tempered now; for I must tell you, that I'm apprenticed now to a French lady called Madame Michaud, and I've been there a week. I didn't mean to come and tell you and Matthew about it till

I'd been there a month, so then I should know better how I liked it. It's what Miss Marnier calls a small, quiet place, and Madame is a good Christian lady. There's fifteen girls in the work-room, and two ladies over them; and oh, Hughie! if you could only see the lovely things they make up,—such flowers and lace and velvet and silk! Oh, I never saw such lovely things, and by-and-by I shall learn to work them up.”

“Are the girls pleasant and nice, Lisa?” “No, that's just what they aren't; and that's what I'm afraid will break my temper. They're always talking silly things about young men; and they call me a quiet, dowdy chit.”

Lisa blushed again, and looked down to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes. “Lisa,” said Hugh, who was watching her.

“Yes, Hughie,” she answered, without looking up.

“Look at me,” he said. She raised her eyes then and revealed the tears. “Oh, Lisa!” he exclaimed, with smiling reproach, “you a brave little body that fought the world for years, crying because silly girls call you dowdy! You are not dowdy: you are neat, and respectable, and nice, just as you should be; so don't be vexed with them, and don't wish to be smart and vain, or we shan't dare to say we know you!”

“Oh no, I don't!” exclaimed Lisa. “Only it have made me uncomfortable to be the only one different to them; but if they didn't go on so about it, I shouldn't mind a bit. Thanks I to myself, if they'd just seen me two or three years ago, they would talk! Why, I'm a princess to what I was in those days, with scarcely a decent thing on me. I'm sure I've got cause enough to be thankful and contented.”

“Yes, you have, Lisa,” said Hugh kindly, “so try to be content, and don't wish to be any different. Don't mind what they say, and they'll soon leave off teasing, and come to respect and like you, as we do. You must think, Lisa, that you haven't got them to please, but your old friends,—Miss Marnier, and Matthew, and me.”

“Ah, yes!” said Lisa, looking pleased and radiant again. “And it isn't so bad as it would be if I'd got to stay there although his homely manner had not in the least changed towards her. If they had met more frequently this shyness might never have been seen; but now Hugh was growing a tall handsome youth of seventeen, it seemed strange to her, when she occasionally saw him, to be chatting to him coolly and calmly as when he was a little boy of nine or ten, and she could not always manage to do so.”

When they reached Victoria Park, Hugh proposed that they should go through it to Miss Marnier's; and as the distance they would have to go was lessening, Hugh recurred to the subject which they had some time since dropped, and said, “Well, Lisa, I do hope things will go pleasantly for you at this French lady's house. If you think the young girl you spoke of would be a good companion for you, you must keep close to her, and make a friend of her, and then you will not mind so much if the others are not kind and friendly.”

“Yes, I think I shall keep to Alice Reany,” answered Lisa: “she is quieter than the rest; and sometimes she looks so sad, as if she'd got a big trouble.”

“I wonder how often we shall hear about you when we go away?” asked Hugh. “I suppose you can write nicely now, Lisa? So we shall be expecting that you will send us a note now and then, to let us know how you are getting on.”

“Yes, I can write pretty well, since Miss Marnier took me in hand,” answered Lisa, absently, looking straight before her. She was thinking, with a heavy heart, of how painfully strange it would seem when London was emptied of Hugh and Matthew, who with Miss Marnier, were everything to her, the only friends to whom she could run to tell of her joys and sorrows.

With a short, nervous laugh, she said, “I'm sure I shall miss you and Matthew dreadfully. And, of course, you'll forget me when you live in a new place amongst new faces.”

“No, we shall never forget you, Lisa,” answered Hugh, kindly. “And that you may not think so, I will write to you regularly, if you will answer the letters, and tell us all about yourself.”

“I should like that!” exclaimed Lisa, looking up at him with a brightening