

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, December 2nd, 1877.—The Deliverance.—Acts xxvii. 33-44.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 33-37.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven."—Psalm cvii. 30.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxvii. 27-44. Tuesday, vs. 27; Mark iv. 35-41. Wednesday, vs. 33; Matthew xxv. 32-46. Thursday, vs. 33; 1 Tim. iv. Friday, Jonah i. ii. Saturday, Genesis viii. Sunday, 2 Cor. xi. 16-29.

ANALYSIS.—I. The morning meal. Vss. 33-37. II. Casting out the cargo. Vss. 38. III. Making toward shore. Vss. 39, 40. IV. The ship run aground. Vss. 41. V. Contary counsel. Vss. 42, 43. VI. All safe to land. Vss. 44.

QUESTIONS.—What is meant by the vessel "driven up and down in Adria"? How much was a fathom to them. Ans. About six feet. Why did they cast out four anchors? Why from the stern? How were these sailors seen to be deceitful? How selfish? How was their plan thwarted?

Vs. 33. Why does Paul advise all to take food?

Vs. 35. Before eating, what does Paul do? What other examples of giving thanks at meals do the Scriptures afford us? Matt. xv. 36; Mark viii. 6; John vi. 11; 1 Cor. x. 30, 31; 1 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

Vs. 38. What further means of escape do they use? Where is divine sovereignty asserted in this chapter? Vss. 22, 23, 26, 34. Where is human agency relied upon? Vss. 31, 32, 38, 40, 41.

Vs. 39. What inlet, with a shore convenient for landing, did they find? What did they at once resolve to do?

Vs. 40. By what means did they try to accomplish this?

Vs. 41. Into what place did they fall? How was this place of two seas formed? What now happened to the vessel?

Vs. 42. What cruel advice do the soldiers now give?

Vs. 43. Who replies as a philanthropist? How do the prisoners again owe their lives to Paul?

Vs. 44. Was this Paul's first shipwreck? 2 Cor. xi. 25.

How does Paul differ from Jonah? What made Julius so kind to Paul? Where have we seen Paul's prudence in this voyage? Where his faith? Where his love? Where his calmness? Where his firmness? Where his grateful use of means?

The storm does not cease. The vessel still drifts in Adria, that natural division of the Mediterranean which Humboldt names the Syrtic basin, and which had the coasts of Sicily, Italy, Greece, and Africa for its boundaries. It is the fourteenth night after leaving Crete. Fearing to be driven on the rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and "longed for day." The most powerful anchor of all that was carried—"the last hope," as it was called—was thrown last. See Heb. vi. 19. The Bay of Malta was regarded as good holding-ground. The sailors were now getting desperate. They conspired to desert the ship by letting down the boat, on the pretence of letting more anchors out of the bow. But Paul interposed with words that furnish a marked illustration of the working of human effort with divine decrees. "Except these abide in the ship," said Paul to Julius, "ye cannot be saved." Then the soldiers cut the ropes by which the sailors were lowering the boat, and the last visible means of safety was swept away into the darkness. The willingness of the soldiers, however, to sacrifice the boat, shows what wonderful ascendancy Paul had gained over his companions.

EXPOSITION.—Three topics, viz.: Good Cheer—The Ship's Run—and Escape from the Wreck.

I. Good Cheer. Verses 33-37.—Verse 33.—While the day was coming. After anchoring, and thwarting the mean attempt of the ship's crew (vs. 32), between, perhaps, one or two o'clock (vs. 27) and the dawn. Fasting. Not, however, implying total abstinence from food. So the words, "taken nothing," means nothing adequate to the needs of the body.

Verse 34.—Wherefore, etc. This abstinence had caused weakness, and the morning's work would require strength. For this is for your health. Or, rather, for effecting an escape—"preservation." For not a hair, etc. See on this proverb

1 Kings i. 52; Matt. x. 30; Luke xxi. 18. Paul adds this to inspire hope, and so incline the men to eat, and get ready for the hard work which their "salvation," was to require.

Verse 35.—He took bread, etc. To add to his words the force of his example, he did this "in the presence of all." He could also fitly give thanks to God publicly, because God's word to them all was their ground of hope for help.

Verse 36.—Then were they all, etc. Or, And being made of good cheer, they also all proceeded to take food. Despair had taken away appetite; hope restored it.

Verse 37.—And we were in all, etc. Including crew, passengers, prisoners, etc. Says Howson: "There seems no reason why we should suppose the old trading vessels of the Mediterranean to be much smaller than our own. Mr. Smith infers that her burthen was between 1,000 and 1,100 tons. Josephus informs us that there were six hundred on board the ship from which he and about eighty others escaped. The 'Castor and Pollux' carried the wrecked two hundred and seventy-six, in addition to her own burthen." xxviii. 11.

The Ship's Run. Verses 38-41.—38.—And when they had eaten, etc. They proceeded to lighten the ship [by] throwing out the grain into the sea.

Food gave strength, and hope gave motive. For this work there may have been two or three hours. The ship being at anchor, and, possibly, the storm less violent, they could take up the hatchways. No longer was there need of the grain for ballast: but there was need to make the ship light, in order to run as far into shore as possible, without striking bottom.

There was but one purpose now, viz.: to escape with life. Ship, cargo, everything, were counted nothing, except as serving that purpose. Grain was the principal commodity exported from Egypt. Compare vs. 6.

Verse 39.—Day at last—so longed for. Vs. 29. Knew not land. This island

Melita (xxviii. 1), now Malta, was well known to sailors; but "the scene of the shipwreck was remote from the principal harbor." A certain creek. Or, bay. Now known as St. Paul's Bay, at the northwest extremity of the island. The word translated "shore," means a flat, beach-like shore—such as exists on the west side of St. Paul's Bay.

Verse 40.—And when they had taken up, etc. A wrong translation. The Bible Union Version correctly gives: "And cutting the anchors entirely away, they abandoned them [that is, the anchors] to the sea, at the same time unfastening the bands of the rudders, and hoisting the foresail [not "mainsail"] to the wind, they made toward the beach." No time to weigh anchor, and no more need for anchors; hence the cutting of their cables.

Verse 41.—Falling into a place, etc. The currents probably drove the ship from her course, so that she struck. The bottom of the bay was then, as now, clayey.

The Escape. Verses 42-44.—Verse 42.—The soldiers' counsel, etc. Because of the iron rigor of the Roman law in punishing those who allowed the escape of prisoners. xii. 19; xvi. 26. To get to land would require the unchaining of the prisoners, and their possible, if not probable, escape.

Verse 43.—Willing to save, etc. Rather, resolved. His plan as to Paul was as fixed as theirs, and had behind it authority. He must save all, if one, since no reason could be given to government for discrimination. Good reason was there to save the man who had saved the whole. Swimmers first, without helps; the rest meanwhile getting ready, and also encouraged by the escape of the swimmers.

Verse 44.—The boards in use about the ship, and pieces of the ship, broken by the men or the waves. SAFE AT LAST.—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, December 9th, 1877.—Paul in Melita.—Acts xxviii. 1-10.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise."—Rom. i. 14.

Examiner: "And who reigned after Saul?" Answer: "David." Examiner: "And who came after David?" Answer: "Solomon." Sharp Little Girl: "Oh, please, sir, the Queen of Sheba."

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.
DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XLVIII.—LEAVING THE OLD HOME.

A very pleasant Christmas Day was that last one spent by Matthew in his old home. They chattered about the past and the future, they sang carols accompanied by the concertina, which Hugh had recently bought, and upon which he had managed already to play several tunes; and after leading for some time with his clear tenor voice, Matthew presently said to him, 'Hugh, my lad, d'ye think you could manage to pipe out that last sweet un that yer mother sung?' 'Yes, sir, I think I quite know it now,' replied Hugh. And Dorothy—having heard the history of that memorable street-singing, when her daughter sang out weakly for the last time in the chill night air—settled herself nervously in Matthew's arm-chair to listen to Hugh. Matthew sat with his elbow on the table, shading his eyes with his hand.

"I remember, I remember
The house where I was born"

sang out Hugh clearly; and as Dorothy listened her imagination was at work, and by-and-by Hugh and his surroundings faded away dimly, and in her mind's eye she saw instead her dying child with white face and sunken eyes, standing in the cruel night wind singing for bread for her boy, while memory was recalling the little cottage in Kent, the beloved home of her childhood, to which she had sent appeals for sympathy and help in vain, during the troublous time of her widowhood and want.

Before Hugh had reached the end of the song his voice grew tremulous and finally broke down, while a jerky sob escaped Dorothy, as she buried her face in her hands; and a tear fell surreptitiously from under Matthew's hand on to the table. Lisa's eyes were full, but she controlled herself, and getting up impulsively, she went and put her hand softly on Hugh's shoulder, saying, 'It brings everything back as clear as day, doesn't it, Hugh? But don't fret; let us sing her other one all together, and then we shall be thinking where she is; not where she was, and that'll comfort us all. Do try to sing the other, Hugh, and I'll help you.'

Hugh played the tune through softly, twice before he could manage his voice, and then he sang out in ringing, jubilant tones, 'There is a happy land, far, far away.' Matthew did his best to join in with a bass note now and then, thinking the while not so much of Dora as of his beloved Patty and her baby-boy, thinking also (as he could not do eight years ago) of the happy meeting in that happy land which a few years at the most would bring about; and Dorothy, essaying to swell the song in a high, cracked treble, thought not so much of the future as of the past, when a sunny little girl sat at her feet singing that and other sweet hymns of childhood. Lisa sang out as clearly as Hugh; but Alice Reany did not know it, so she sat silent, wondering within herself that a bit of a hymn should affect these people so much.

The young folks presently regained their good spirits, and lively chat prevailed again. But Matthew did not recover himself, although he made a brave effort to be cheerful, and to entertain his guests. He was thinking of its being the last Christmas in the old place, where he had seen at least forty pass over him; and old people do not easily detach themselves from familiar old places fraught with a thousand tender associations.

He tried hard during the next three months to gently loose the bonds which held him to the spot; but notwithstanding all his efforts, he found when the time arrived that it was very hard to go. He had disposed of the remains of his stock with the exception of his chatty old parrot, a large cageful of his singing birds, and a handsome case of stuffed foreign birds of splendid plumage. These were to be carried off with them to the country to enliven the new home and remind them of the old one. All the large cages had been sold; but the tiny close ones had for some time past been used for firewood. This was done at Hugh's suggestion, Matthew acting readily upon it.

Very bare the four walls of the shop looked stripped of its stock. Matthew felt as uncomfortable as he could be, 'jest as upset as my old Tom here,' he said, as the cat walked to and fro mewing miserably, and rubbing against Matthew's trousers now and then for comfort, as if it understood exactly what was going on.

It was a bright morning, soft and spring like, for the twenty-fourth of March, and a light breeze was stirring, all reminding the heart, weary of dull days, that the winter was over and gone, the time of the singing of birds and of the appearing of the flowers had come. Matthew was making-believe that he was busy, getting together materials for bird-stuffing, ready for Hugh to pack up. In the midst of the work he was interrupted by the entrance of the miserable-looking man in the long coat who had once before called to offer birds for sale. He was now come on the same errand, and acting upon the advice which Matthew had curtly given him before, he now brought his stock in an old cage, in stead of a stocking. He looked round in astonishment at the bare walls, and then, as he drew a faded blue handkerchief off the cage, 'I dunno if yer deals in these now, gaffer,' he said, in a more sepulchral tone than ever, 'but anyway these coves is prime uns if yer wants a bargain.' They were not in much better plight than those he had formerly brought in a stocking, for they were beating about wildly against the bars. Matthew alluded to this.

'Yes, guv'nor, they was cotched only yesterday on Hackney Common.'

'What's yer price?' asked Matthew, gazing at him with a peculiar expression.

Expecting to be beaten down, the man mentioned it in a cringing way.

'Yes, I'll have 'em,' said Matthew; 'and they're the last I shall ever buy. Look ee here, my man, I've bin a trader in birds for more'n forty year, and I've come to the conclusion that them forty year might ha' bin spent in a better way than trucklin' in prisoned things as the good Lord made to go free. What's done can't be undone, though, more's the pity; but if I'd got my life to live over again, I'd see if I couldn't please the Lord a bit better at my daily work, and do good for Him as is good to me. There, take yer money, and good-mornin' my man.'

When he had gone his way, rather wondering at Matthew's words, the old man turned to Hugh and said, 'Now, Hugh, this afternoon we'll go to Hackney Common on a bit o' business. Mrs. Dorothy'll go on with the packin' while we're out, and it'll do us good to have a blow.'

'What are we going there for, sir?' asked Hugh, curiously.

'You'll see when we get there, my lad,' answered Matthew, smiling.

So after dinner off they started with their cageful of newly-caught birds, away to Hackney Common. Arrived there, Matthew put his cage on the ground, and with the soft wind blowing around them, and the sun shining warmly in the cloudless blue, he stooped down and opened the cage-door. With terrified flutterings and chirpings the birds one by one struggled through the opening, and soared up into the fragrant air, wildly joyous to find themselves free. Matthew gazed after them till his eyes grew too dim to see anything, then he said with a great sigh of satisfaction, 'There, Hugh, that's the wind-up to my bird-business!'

Hugh had been silently watching this transaction, his face glowing with deep feeling. 'It's the best deal in birds you ever made, sir!' he exclaimed enthusiastically. 'Allow me to congratulate you upon it.' And he extended his left hand for Matthew's, and warmly shook it.

'Ay, ay,' answered Matthew with a calm smile, 'I've done many a worse thing than that, I guess.'

And very light-heartedly they took their way back to the shop for the last time.

Not so light-hearted was Matthew on the following day when the cab stood at the door to take them away to the Victoria Station. The house was completely stripped, their goods and chattels having been despatched by road very early in the morning, and Dorothy with them. The parrot, and the little singing birds, and Tom the cat, who was securely packed in a hamper, from whence issued a continuous muffled pro-

testation in the way of mewing, were to accompany Matthew and Hugh in the cab. While these were being stowed in by Hugh, Matthew was fidgeting about the empty shop, as if he had got St. Vitus's dance. If it had been a prison van at the door waiting to conduct him to durance vile he could not have been more loth to enter it.

Hugh stood at the cab-door waiting for him to come out, knowing that he was quite ready. But when two or three minutes passed and he did not come, went in to see after him. He found him upstairs taking a last look round each of the rooms, with a sad, grave face.

'Well, Hugh,' he said, in a low voice, 'this ain't a easy job now it's come to the last, is it now?'

'It isn't, indeed, sir, and it's worse for you than for me. But really we must be going, or we shall lose the train, sir.'

Matthew roused himself and said, 'Bless the train, for helpin' us to tear ourselves away! Yes, we'll go now, Hugh, and farewell to the old place!'

He walked silently down stairs and out, locked the shop door for the last time, and deputed the cabman, whom he knew, to deliver the key to the landlord.

As they drove off, Hugh said sadly, 'Lisa didn't come after all to wish us good-bye.'

'I guess she couldn't bear it,' answered Matthew, 'and so she thought last week's good-bye would do.'

(To be continued.)

A Londoner who is the happy possessor of some meadows on the banks of the Thames, in those meadows keeps some cows. One morning his dairymaid brought him a letter which she said was tied to the tail of one of the cows. On opening it he found it contained a three-penny piece and the following pencilled memorandum. "To the owner of this cow. Sir: For the last hour we have been trying at various houses to purchase some milk. Having been unsuccessful we took the liberty of extracting a soda-water bottle full from the bearer. Please accept our apologies and our three pence. Yours respectfully. Three Bank Holiday Keepers."

The Shah of Persia one day expressed a longing for a Krupp cannon in the presence of the Russian Minister who at once informed the Czar of the Shah's desire. The Czar, who was anxious to gratify the Shah, by return mail, as it were, sent on the monster cannon—a 300 pounder—to his ally. The present was landed at Enzeli, on the Caspian Sea, but it took a month's labor by a regiment of the Persian Army to get the cannon to Teheran. Arrived there, a day was appointed to fire it. The Court and almost the entire population of the city assembled. Bang! went the cannon, away scampered half the multitude, and down tumbled the minaret off one of the city gates, near which the gun had been placed. But there was another disaster. In an hour's time a messenger arrived from a village five miles away, and reported that its inhabitants were bewailing the loss of their mosque. The cannon-ball from the cannon had struck the building and ruined it. The Shah was so dismayed by the effect that he never permitted the cannon to be fired again.

The Rev. Robert Smith, of the Scotch Church, Berwick-on-Tweed, has intimated to his congregation, that after the 17th of this month he shall cease to minister to their spiritual wants. But he does not like to quit his pulpit without candidly stating the reasons that induce him to take this step. These are three—"1, The merely nominal and useless connection which his church has with the Established Church in Scotland; 2, his disappointment at the monetary support given him; and 3, his failure to obtain 'such harmonious loving connection as could easily have surmounted any shortcomings in the funds.'"

The U. S. House of Representatives has chosen quite an oddity for its chaplain this year, in Dr. John Poisal, an old minister of the Southern Methodist Church. He started in life as a seismometer and studied theology while working on the bench, and has been an editor and a pastor in New York. He is nearly blind, and is said to know the Bible and the Methodist Hymn-book almost by heart, his want of eyesight being compensated by a wonderful memory. Congressman J. Randolph Tucker, of Virginia, was converted under his preaching. He has been in the ministry fifty years.

The Louisville Courier-Journal says that if the world at large knew of what villainous stuffs brandy and whisky are made the present crop of drunkards would be about the last; or, at any rate, all future crops would be small. This is pleasant reading for hard drinkers.