

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1877.

SUNDAY, Oct. 28th, 1877.—Paul before the Council.—Acts xxiii. 1-11.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Vss. 6-11.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."—Acts vi. 10.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, Acts xxiii. 1-11. Tuesday, vs. 1; Acts iv. 5-22. Wednesday, vs. iii; Matthew xxiii. 27-39. Thursday, vs. 5; John xviii. 15-27. Friday, vs. 8; Mark xii. 18-27. Saturday, vs. 9; 1 Cor. xv. 35-58. Sunday, vs. 11; Psalm xci.

ANALYSIS.—I. Paul's conscious integrity, vs. 1. II. Paul smitten on the mouth, vs. 2-5. III. Discussion in the council, vs. 6-9. IV. Paul again in the castle, vs. 10. V. Visited by the Lord, vs. 11.

QUESTIONS.—Why did Paul commence the proceedings himself? When Paul formerly was present in the council, what martyr had been tried and condemned? In what service had he once acted under the authority of this council? Acts xxvi. 9; 1 Tim. i. 13.

Vs. 1. Why does Paul allude to his habitual conscientiousness of life?

Vs. 2. When Ananias found that Paul would quail before him? What did he do?

Vs. 3. What law did this command of the high priest violate? Deut. i. 16; Lev. xix. 15? What is meant by "whited wall"? How did it apply to Ananias?

Vs. 4. How did the by-standers remonstrate with Paul?

Vs. 5. What is Paul's reply? What do you understand by it? When we make mistakes, what should we at once do? John xiii. 8, 9.

Vs. 6. How does Paul show that he is a Pharisee, and therefore an orthodox Jew? In pleading for the resurrection, does he not plead for Christianity?

Vs. 7. A party spirit is aroused; how did this appear?

Vs. 8. In what did the Sadducees not believe? Eccl. xii. 7; Matt. x. 28; Luke xxiii. 43; Phil. i. 21-24?

Vs. 9. What kind of a controversy now takes place?

Vs. 10. The Roman commandant fears serious trouble; what precaution does he take to prevent it?

Vs. 11. How is Paul now encouraged?

The apostle Paul, like the Redeemer himself (Matt. xxvii. 57, etc.) and like Peter and John (Acts iv. v, etc.; v. 27, etc.) was now brought before the Sanhedrim. He commenced the proceedings himself, for he had not been cited by the assembly, but had been placed before them by the chief captain Lysias. Ananias presided in the assembly as high priest—an office which he possessed rather by usurpation than by legitimate authority. He had been high priest A. D. 48-59, with one exception, when his cruelty and avarice had caused him to be sent to Rome for trial. After two years he was sent back to Judea by the favor of Agrippa, and allowed to resume his authority. Paul was now in the presence of the council before which, when he was present, Stephen had been judged. That moment could hardly be forgotten by him, but he looked steadfastly at his inquisitors, among whom he would recognize many who had been his fellow-pupils in the school of Gamaliel and his associates in the persecution of the Christians.

EXPOSITION.—Paul is brought to the Sanhedrim, and the Lord Jesus comes to Paul. The Sanhedrim is baffled, and the apostle assured. There are three sections to the lesson—Paul's attestation of his integrity to the Sanhedrim, his division of the Sanhedrim, and his vision of the Lord.

I. Integrity Asserted. Verses 1-5.—The place of asserting it was before the Sanhedrim, or Supreme Court of the Jews, which usually met in the hall Gazieth, or the Stone Chamber, partly within the Court of the Priests, and partly within the Court of Israel, on the southeast. The only reason for supposing that at this time it met elsewhere, is the apparent implication in vs. 10 that the Roman soldiery had access to it. If they met elsewhere it was near, and they may have been required not to enter their sacred hall in order that Lysias might have entrance. They were trying Paul in order to furnish Lysias with facts, and Paul was regarded as still in his custody. The Sanhedrim, of seventy members, were wont to sit in a semi-circle with the president in the centre.

The manner of Paul's assertion is noted. (1.) With an intent look "earnestly beholding," vs. 1. xiii. 10. (2.) Promptly, seemingly not waiting for questions. (3.) Unqualifiedly, of the whole period of his Christian life (there was no question as to his life previous to conversion, xxvi. 9), and of all his conduct during this period. The expression "until this day," is significant. It covered his ministry throughout, denied that he had been less loyal to Israel in his later than in his early ministry, and in particular denied the accusation of the previous day, xxi. 28.

The effect of his words upon the chief priest, and probably upon the rest, was exasperation. To smite on the mouth expressed abhorrence of the word spoken by that mouth, and is a style of public reprimand still in use by public authorities in the East where objectionable language is used before them. It is done with a stick or the heel of a slipper, but is regarded as unlawful before trial and condemnation. Christ, (John xviii. 22,) was struck by the palm of the hand.

Paul's malediction, stigmatizing Ananias as a hypocrite by a contemptuous epithet (vs. 3 explained in Matt. xxiii. 27), and denouncing upon him God's righteous retribution. Paul's indignation was holy, and wrought in him as filled with the Holy Spirit. Whatever his apology means, it does not mean or say that he had felt or spoken too strongly or wrongly of the man and his deed. Some regard his words as prophetic of the death of Ananias, which was by assassination. Deut. xix. 15-19; Prov. xvii. 15. See Gal. i. 1-10.

The reproof to Paul was by the servants, as though his words had struck terror to Ananias; and silenced him.

Paul's concession (Ex. xxii. 28) made to the Council ("brethren"), vs. 5, not to his reprovers, admits only that he did not consider sufficiently the office, which implies that in the other respects he was right. It thus enforced his malediction. Others with less evidence take the word translated "wist" (vs. 5), as here meaning know, and explain his ignorance variously as due to near-sightedness, to his long absence from Jerusalem, to the (supposed) failure of Ananias to have on his distinctive dress, or to be in his official seat.

II. The Division. Verses 6-10.—(1) The opportunity. Paul had gained an advantage by his assertion of his integrity, and his just charge against the high priest. The Council had not recovered itself, and he seized upon this as the time to divide it against itself, not to escape justice, but to escape injustice. (2) His merits, too, are as honorable as his end, simply the statement of a fact concerning himself, namely, that on the main question dividing the two sects he was with the Pharisees. Paul only asserts the doctrine generally. The "hope and resurrection," means that for which Israel hopes, namely, the resurrection of the dead. The doctrine of the Pharisees is stated as follows by Josephus, who himself belonged to that sect: "Souls have an immortal vigor, and are destined to be rewarded, or punished in another state according to the life here, as it has been one of virtue or vice; and the good will be permitted to live again (that is, in another body on the earth), and that the wicked will be consigned 'to an eternal prison.'" ("Both" in vs. 9, means the resurrection, and the existence of angels and spirits.) The Sadducees, he says, "hold that the souls of men perish with their bodies." See vs. 8; Mark xii. 18. (4) The effect. Exactly what was desired. The larger party probably were Pharisees, and their mad zeal is no longer against, but for Paul. The Scribes leave to their hearers the inference that Paul's visions were genuine. The conflict and scuffle which followed (vs. 10) show the fury of partisan hate, and the sad lack of judicial dignity, and even of common decency in this assembly.

III. The Vision. Verse 11.—The Lord; that is, Jesus, appeared, and no mere appearance or illusion. See for like instances xviii. 9, 10; ii. 55-60; comp. xxvii. 24, etc. A present Christ is still a precious truth. "Be of good cheer," or, "be courageous still," that is, keep up the courage which has thus far sustained you.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, November 4th, 1877.—Paul before Felix.—Acts xxiv. 10-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee."—Acts xxiv. 25.

The Story of the Lesson.

FOR THE PRIMARY CLASS.

By order of Lysias, the chief captain Paul was brought before the Jewish council, for trial. Looking earnestly upon its members, Paul said:—"Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God unto this day." The high priest, whose name was Ananias, was so angry at what Paul said that he told the servants to strike him on the mouth. Paul quickly replied, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." Those who stood by asked him if that was the way to speak to God's high priest. Paul said that he did not know that he was the high priest. Some of the members of the council were Pharisees, who believed that the dead would rise again, and that there were angels. Some were Sadducees, who said neither was true. Paul saw these two parties, and cried out in the council, "Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, and the son of a Pharisee: I am judged because I teach that the dead rise again." Then there was a quarrel between the two parties; and now the Pharisees took Paul's part, and said, "We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God." The captain was afraid that Paul would be pulled to pieces between these angry parties, and hence he ordered the soldiers to go and bring him to the fort, where he would be secure from harm.

Select Serial.

From The Day of Rest.

DORA'S BOY.

BY MRS. ELLEN ROSS.

CHAP. XLIII.—LESSONS OF HOPE AND REST.

As Matthew walked along with Josiah Hartlebury, Lisa and Hugh following, he gave him a rough sketch of Lisa's history. Josiah responded with burning words in condemnation of drink, and of the Government for deriving large revenues from unrighteousness, by licensing houses so greatly in excess of the reasonable wants of the community, making it easy instead of difficult for men to go to ruin in this way. Then, during the two or three minutes that remained for walking and talking, the conversation was changed, and Hugh became the theme of it, Josiah urging that arrangements should be made for him to attend the School of Design at South Kensington, which would benefit him greatly in the profession which it now seemed probable he was to follow through life.

Hugh was deeply interested to hear an address from Josiah Hartlebury once more. He spoke with all his old eloquence and earnestness, yet in a far more subdued manner than of yore; and this Hugh felt to be a great improvement. Time had moderated the leaping, roaring flames of his enthusiasm down to a steady red heat, less dazzling but of greater benefit to those who sat around him for their comfort and good. In his passionate desire for souls he did not now pour over them a storm of words which made them cower and shrink; but having learnt that God speaks in a still small voice as well as in the rushing tempest, his homely and appeal fell more frequently now like rain upon the mown grass, or like the dew of evening falling softly on parched and fading flowers.

There was not a man, woman, or child in his small assembly who did not get something to carry away and refresh life. Lisa walked home under the starry heavens with her cup of contentment and joy in the Lord full to overflowing; Matthew walked away encouraged to a more child-like trust in his Heavenly Father, and with less anxiety about the future; and Hugh felt strengthened for the chequered life that lay before him, and inspired with new courage and determination to do with his might whatever his hand found to do.

The very next day he set to work at his designs with redoubled zeal, and with his heart light with sanguine expectations of success. Mr. Hartlebury was going to help him, and he thought now that his path lay straight before him, no obstacle in the way, and the sun of prosperity shining clearly over it. True to his promise Mr. Hartlebury came within a fortnight, and found that

Hugh had prepared with great care a few beautiful designs as specimens. With his practised eye Josiah at once saw which would be most suitable for the respective factories to which they were to be sent; and with Hugh sitting by observant, he wrote a short note to each place, and neatly packed up the drawings ready for forwarding. "There now," he said, "I've given ye a business lesson; and may the Lord bless this undertaking! Now let me give ye a bit of advice, my lad: don't expect to hear from these places too soon, and then you won't suffer disappointment. Remember you're only one of scores, perhaps, that have sent to 'em on the same business, and you've no right to think you'll be attended to first. So don't lose heart if they keep ye waiting. And when they do write, if you ain't exactly clear how to act, and want advice, just send to me, and I'll give ye the benefit of my experience. See now, I'll write my name and address in pencil inside your portfolio, and then you'll always have it at hand."

Hugh thanked him heartily, and then Josiah said, "Now put on your cap and run to post with 'em. I'd offer to take 'em as I go along; but it's such an important thing, posting your first venture to the big outside world, that nobody but yourself must have the pleasure and honour of doing it."

Hugh laughed and coloured, and ran off with his treasures light-heartedly.

Ah, how much need there was of Josiah's warning to be patient! Months after month passed by, and all the response Hugh had received was a polite note from the Kidderminster house, saying that they were fully supplied with designs, and returning his with a word or two of praise about them. The northern houses seemed to have quite forgotten him.

During this time he had for a while attended classes at South Kensington, and had worked most assiduously at home. But now he was becoming so anxious to realize something by his endeavours, that he was seriously asking himself whether he should not seek a situation as light-porter, or even errand-boy, until success came by his designs. For, as Matthew reluctantly confessed, when Hugh questioned him closely on the subject, they were getting into low water. The twenty pounds of Matthew's, and the five pounds of Hugh's, were melting fast away; and when the next quarter's rent should fall due, it seemed likely that there would be a scramble to get it together.

At the end of six months Matthew's money and Hugh's five pounds were gone, and they had to depend upon what little the decayed business brought them in. Matthew tried in vain to hide the state of affairs from Hugh: he took such minute observation of what was going on, and made such persistent enquiries, that the truth could not be hidden from him. When at length Matthew had reluctantly to confess that their all was gone, he said, "Well, never mind, Hugh, my lad, we must have faith in the Lord as watches over us, and knows all things. I've many a time blamed Mrs. Sarah for her cancerin' anxieties about herself and her affairs, at the same time as she persisted to believe in the Lord. What's the use of believin' if we can't trust Him out-and-out, and be at peace? We may jest as well not know Him. There was a day when I should ha' been fair broke down with werriting, if I'd found myself in this pickle,—with not a farthing in the bank, and a big head as don't bring us in enough to live on. But now, thank the good Lord, things is different with me. I can't look in at crammed barns and say, 'Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.' But I can say to my soul, 'Hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise Him who is the help of my countenance, and my God.' And I guess the Lord ain't sayin' 'Thou fool! to that; cos ain't it writ, 'Happy is he whose hope is in the Lord?'"

Hugh brightened up wonderfully at these words, and he said hopefully, "Mr. Pedder, I won't wait any longer! I'll write this very day to the places I sent my designs to. It's very likely they've put them by, and quite forgotten them; and perhaps a gentle reminder will bring us back a good answer. So I'll write at once."

Very well, do, my lad, said Matthew.

"I think it must be about time now that your turn came to be attended to."

So that night Hugh posted two brief business-letters, written in a beautiful clear hand, 'a'most like copperplate,' Matthew said, as he proudly read them through. Then they were despatched with many uttered words of hope, and much secret prayer. "We must jest look round, and take a lesson from the birds of the air," said Matthew. "Ain't the sparrow one o' the worthless of 'em, and yet not one of 'em is forgotten before God? So we needn't fear, cos ain't we of more vally than many a sparrow in His sight?"

"We shall not fear, either, sir," answered Hugh. "We must pray, 'give us day by day our daily bread,' and be glad and thankful when He gives us enough for one day, without wishing it was enough for two."

"Ay, ay, surely," responded Matthew. "But we've got more'n enough for to-day, lad, ay, and for next week, too. Only there's rent-day comin' round, and what's to meet that? But I ain't goin' to deject my spirits about that. It'll come in good time, please God!"

And when in a few days the postman brought a very important-looking letter addressed to 'Mr. Hugh Haldane,' which proved to be from the curtain manufactory, accepting the designs sent, Matthew and Hugh were fairly overwhelmed with delight and thankfulness. "Well, my lad," said Matthew in an unsteady voice, as he looked into Hugh's radiant face, "when the desire cometh it is a tree of life," ain't it now? Well, you've got good luck at last, thank the Lord that's sent it! But you ha'n't half read yer letter yet; go on with it."

Hugh sat down and laid his hand affectionately on Matthew's as it rested on his knee, while he went on with his letter. It had far more good news in it than the announcement of the acceptance of the designs: it offered terms for them which Hugh thought must satisfy even Josiah Hartlebury, and it further more requested him to supply them regularly with designs, and to send at his earliest convenience one of a more delicate pattern than those already sent,—a flower-design for superior lace-curtains.

"Hugh, my lad," exclaimed Matthew, with glistening eyes, when he had finished the letter, "there shan't be no more bird-sellin' for you, and potterin' among stuffy cages, which same I knows you can't bear though you don't say so! No, you shan't be vexed and bothered with 'em no more from this hour."

"Nor you, sir," responded Hugh, with joyous excitement. "We'll do now what has been in my heart to do ever since you have been unable to attend to business; and what do you thing that is?"

Never a bit do I know, answered Matthew, wonderingly.

"Well then, we'll shut up shop, if you please, Mr. Pedder, and go and live in the country, where I can get all sorts of designs from the fields and lanes for my beautiful work. And it's just what would set you up; for you're not the same as you used to be, and the country air, and the quiet country life would be just the thing for you after your long business-life."

Matthew looked down on the floor, while Hugh sat with his hand on his waiting for his answer. The idea of going from this stuffy little East-end house out into the elysium of country life was something too good to be realized, although there would be ties to rend in going which would be something like rending heart-strings. Indeed the offer would not have been tempting to him in his palmy days, so attached was he to the old place; but since he had lost his arm, and the business had been declining, he had felt as depressed by his surroundings as some of his caged birds pining for liberty and the sweet air of heaven.

"It's the old place as I brought my Patty to," he said meditatively, without altering his position or raising his eyes; and the place where my own little chap was born; and where I found you, my lad, ay, and sometime greater than you. And I guess if I goes out from here any way but in my coffin, there'd be a job for somebody to get me off; it 'ud be worse than gettin' my old cat to go. And besides, Hugh, what 'ud there be left for me to do if I giv up my birds? I should have to be livin' on your labour; and though I'm sure you're willin' with all yer heart now that that should be so, yet by 'n by when other'll