

The Christian Visitor

History for Young Persons.—Chap. XXII.

THE HEADSHIP OF NEBUCHADNEZZAR.

In the fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, it pleased the Lord to show him in a dream the position that he was to hold as the head of the nations, and the events that should follow in the earth (Dan. ii). Nebuchadnezzar, however, saw these things darkly; and forgot his dream when he awoke in the morning. In the self-willed indulgence of absolute power, he would have destroyed all the wise men of his court, because they could not recall to him the vision; and Daniel, with his Jewish companions, who had been educated in the learning of the Chaldees, were in danger of perishing with the rest. But the Lord heard the united prayer of these believing youths, and revealed Nebuchadnezzar's vision to Daniel the same night, as it is written, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him." The young prophet blessed the God of Heaven, and joyfully went in to be a witness, before the head of the first earthly empire, that there is a living God. The interpretation of this vision is very important, not only because it will give you a lively picture of the chief facts in the world's history up to this time, but because it touches upon the kingdom of Christ which is yet to be established in the earth.

As we proceed, we shall have frequent occasion to look back to this picture; but I can only now dwell upon that part of it which describes the headship of Nebuchadnezzar. "Thou, O king, art a king of kings! for the God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory, &c. Thou art this head of gold." (Dan. ii. 37, 38.) Here we perceive that power is given into the hands of a Gentile by God; and henceforth we shall have to trace the use made of this gift: it is, as it were, a fresh trial of what is in man.

The Jews had been repeatedly warned that they should be given over to Nebuchadnezzar; and they, with the rest of the nations, must submit to his yoke (Jer. xxvii. &c.). But they were very unwilling to submit to this deserved chastisement, and Jehoiakim struggled with the Assyrians till he died. After his son Jehoniah had reigned three troublous months, Nebuchadnezzar again took Jerusalem, and carried away another company of captives, among whom was the prophet Ezekiel, as the Lord would not leave his afflicted people without his word. Nebuchadnezzar again set up a Jewish king, the uncle of Jehoiakim, to whom he gave the name of Zedekiah. Jeremiah the prophet was still left as God's faithful witness in Jerusalem, and went on with his testimony to coming judgment, and earnest entreaties to his people to hear the word of the Lord, throughout the reign of Zedekiah, a period of eleven years. During the last two years, Jerusalem was besieged by the Assyrians; for Zedekiah, not believing the Lord's messages by Jeremiah, had refused to pay tribute to Nebuchadnezzar, and struggled on, still hoping for independence through the help of Aphis or Pharaoh-Hophra, the grandson of Necho, then ruling in Egypt. Hophra had made many conquests by land and sea; and in the pride of his heart was quite ready to declare himself the protector of the Jews; but his attempt to deliver them was of no avail, and only led to his own destruction. Ezekiel declared God's judgment upon this proud king, and the accomplishment of it we shall presently notice. But now all our thoughts may be well engaged in the conclusion of the trial of man in the Lord's land; it only ends as that in the garden had ended. The man and woman were driven out of the garden; and now the young man and maiden, old man and him that stooped for age (at least such as escaped the sword) were driven out of the land, and carried to Babylon as captives (2 Chron. xxxvi. 14-17), B. C. 588.

Nebuchadnezzar returned from Judea in all the pride of a conqueror, bringing the sightless king in chains, with a multitude of mourning captives of all ages and ranks, the spoils of Jerusalem, and the sacred vessels of the Temple. Shortly afterwards he set up a great image of gold in the plain of Dura, which he commanded all his subjects to worship. As it is very usual for persons to remember anything that exalts themselves, and to forget the glory of God, it is possible that

on this occasion, Nebuchadnezzar might have thought of the dream wherein he appeared as the head of gold, while he would not remember that his power was the gift of God. Here then we see the immediate abuse of that power which was given to the Gentiles; this king who had so many nations under his rule, speaking different languages, and whose dominion was the greatest in the world, failed to acknowledge the God of heaven, and in the indulgence of self-will he set up an image which all his subjects must worship under pain of death. Three Jewish youths were the faithful witnesses of the living God on this occasion, and boldly refused to join the noisy multitude who, in their blindness and ignorance, were bowing before the golden image. Their miraculous deliverance from the burning fiery furnace, into which they were thrown by Nebuchadnezzar's command, is well known to you; but I would call your attention to that king's various acknowledgments of God. "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." And in calling to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he said, "Ye servants of the most high God, come forth." Finally, he exclaimed, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies that they might not serve or worship any god except their own God." And then he made a decree, that every people, nation, and language, who should speak anything amiss against their God, should be cut to pieces, &c. But in all this confession, full as it appears, you perceive that the king of Babylon never owned the Lord as his God; and it was that alone which could profit him anything.

To know God as your God is the all-important thing; and the only way in which this blessed knowledge can be obtained, is by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for He sent this message to those who believed in Him, "I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God and your God."

Correspondence.

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR.]

Saint John, May 24, 1853.

DEAR EDITORS,—Please insert this second letter to young Christians, and oblige yours, truly, A. B. C.

Letters to Young Christians.

The position which you now occupy, brings with it new relations; and those relations new duties, new responsibilities, and to faithfully discharge these, must henceforth be the great business of life. True Christianity is unselfish, and those in whose hearts and lives it is found, feel imbued with a portion of that spirit which led its author to come down to earth on his mission of mercy. They desire to be co-workers with him; to impart, as far as lies in their power, the blessings of which they have been made the happy recipients.

Let me, then, impress it upon your minds, that there is full employment in the church of Christ for all your energies. The church is called, in the Scriptures, his body, and that body has no useless, no superfluous members. Again: Christ is the vine, ye are its branches; and, as such, you draw all your nourishment from that true and living vine—its sap and fatness is for you, to the end that you may bring forth fruit, rich, ripe clusters; and indeed you only belong to Christ so long as you produce the peaceable fruits of righteousness; for every branch that beareth not fruit, the vine-dresser takes away, as a useless excrescence. No fruitless branches are permitted there. Often, then, ask yourself, What am I doing to advance my own salvation, and that of others? And if truth compels you to reply, nothing, you have reason for alarm, for constant advancement and improvement is required at the hands of all who would gain the approval of the great Captain of our Salvation at last. Do not, with the appearance of excessive humility, say, I am too weak and insignificant to effect any thing in this cause, dear as it is to me; for true humility, my young friends, does not consist in underrating ourselves, and thus unfitting ourselves for noble, vigorous action, but in learning to place a just and proper estimate upon ourselves, and then acting to the extent of our ability.

True, you may not be a Howard or a Jud-

son, a Charlotte Elizabeth or Hannah Moore, but because you cannot labor in the first rank, that is no reason why you should fold your hands and do nothing; your humble, honest, earnest endeavors, will be as acceptable to God as the offering of the most gifted, for it was God who gave them power to accomplish so much, and they are only rendering back that which was given. He has given you less, and he does not seek from you as much. Will you, therefore, refuse the little you can do? Remember, in the Lord's esteem, the two mites of the widow were more than the offerings of the rich.

Never, say, then, that you have no influence. Most Christians have more than they exercise, and none is so poor as to be entirely destitute. "I have no influence," says a little rivulet that has just issued from the parent spring, "I cannot water the broad valley, or bear the proud vessel upon my bosom. I feel like sinking into the earth and perishing unknown, yet I will try." On goes the tiny stream, and before it is aware of the change, it has become a mountain torrent, leaping on in its glee, and flashing like silver in the sunlight. It reaches the valley and it has become a broad brook, fertilizing the vale through which it wanders, and cheerfully it is singing its song on its way to the sea. It spreads out into a majestic river, and bears uncounted wealth on its tide, and soon it mingles its waters with the ocean, in which the stars smile to see themselves reflected, as in another sky. "I have no influence," says a rain drop, nestled in the bosom of the cloud. "Were I to fall on yonder parched plain, I could do no good; I could not revive a single blade of grass; but, lest I should set a bad example to my sister drops by my seeming unwillingness, I will fall—I will try." The drops have all thus reasoned, and a copious shower descends, the thirsty earth is refreshed, all nature is glad, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose.

Combine your influence, then, small though it be, and it shall be like the brook to the valley, like the rain to the parched earth, the wastes of sin shall blossom; and under your genial influence the fair flowers of virtue shall bloom.

You may not have the tongue or the pen to plead the Lord's cause successfully; but you can exemplify the religion you profess in your daily conduct; and this, after all, is the most powerful, the most effectual teaching; for though many may elude the force of an argument, none can resist the silent, yet eloquent, teaching of a pious, unobtrusive, godly example. There are those to whom you have freer access than all others. At some favorable moment, can you not turn their attention to the Bible; can you not induce them to go with you to the house of God? By acts simple as these, you may be the instruments of much good; and oh! if in the future state it shall appear that you have been the means of leading the sinner to the Saviour, it will be more to you honor than if on earth you had won a crown or swayed a sceptre.

Is there no distress that you can relieve? No sorrow that you can assuage? No erring ones that you can lead back? No ignorant ones, on whose minds to pour the rays of heaven's own light? In a word, be ever usefully employed. By word and deed recommend to others the religion you profess; and in order thus to act, ever keep before you, as the greatest and best of all examples, the Saviour himself, of whom it is recorded, "He went about doing good."

[FOR THE CHRISTIAN VISITOR.]

Hillsborough, May 16th, 1853.

MESSRS. EDITORS,—By your kind permission I continue the course of Sabbath School lessons, commenced in the last number of the Visitor. The second lesson is an outline of the whole history in more full detail than the preceding lesson; in the recapitulatory series which follows, still more ample reference is made to the minute particulars of the Scripture narrative. In some cases it may be desirable to enlarge yet further, although generally this cannot be done to advantage. The ages, intelligence, and general attainments of the scholars, the amount of time devoted to class teaching each Sabbath, the length of the period during which the school is open in each year, and the amount of self-preparation required, and that may be anticipated, on the part of the teachers, ought all to be duly estimated in preparing lessons for any

particular Sabbath School; but in a course intended for general use, regard cannot be paid to these matters, but it must be left to the teacher to abbreviate, or otherwise alter the lessons to render them better adapted to meet local peculiarities.

SECOND LESSON.

The principal events of the first period, ending, 1656, A. M., are—1st. The creation of the heavens, earth, plants, animals and man.—1 chap. Gen.; 2d. Man placed in Eden, in a state of probation.—Gen. ii. 8, 15, 17; 3rd. Man's disobedience and fall.—Gen. iii. 6, 23, 24; 4th. Murder of Abel.—Gen. iv. 4, 8; 5th. Corruption of Mankind.—Gen. vi. 5, 7. The flood sent to punish the wickedness of men.—Gen. vii. 19, 24.

The principal events of the second period, ending, 2082, A. M., are, 1st. The attempt to build the Tower of Babel.—Gen. xi. 4; 2d. The confusion of language, and consequent dispersion of men.—Gen. xi. 9; 3rd. Relapse into idolatry.—Joshua xxiv. 2; 4th. The call of Abraham.—Gen. xii. 1.

The principal events of the third period, ending, 2513, A. M., are, 1st. The children of Israel going into Egypt.—Gen. xli. 5, 7; 2nd. Their bondage in Egypt.—Exodus i. 8, 13; 3rd. Their exodus.—Exodus xiii. 17, 22.

The principal events of the fourth period, ending, 2992, A. M., are, 1st. The giving of the law.—Exodus xix. 7, 8, 9; 2nd. The wandering in the desert.—Numbers xiv. 28, 35; 3rd. Partial conquest of Canaan.—Judges i. 27-36; 4th. The tribes governed by Judges.—Judges iv. 4; ix. 2, 3; x. 1, 2; 5th. Their becoming a kingdom under Saul, David and Solomon.—1 Sam. xi. 15; 2 Sam. ii. 4; 1 Kings, ii. 12. The building and dedication of the temple.—1 Kings vi. 1; viii. 62, 66.

The principal events of the fifth period, ending 3416, A. M., are—1st. The revolt of the ten tribes—1 Kings xii. 16-29. 2d. The formation of the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah—1 Kings xiii. 20. 3d. The Assyrian Captivity—2 Kings xvi. 5-6: the Babylonish captivity—2 Kings xxv. 1-8, 11.

The principal events of the sixth period, ending 4000 A. M., are—1st. The return from captivity and rebuilding of the temple—Ezra i. and iii. 1. 2d. The birth of Christ—John i. 14.

The whole of the foregoing is given as one lesson, but in many cases it will doubtless be found convenient to divide it into two. Perhaps the best mode of teaching such a lesson is to commence by repeating to the class the list of events, throwing in any explanation that may be deemed necessary, and then to question the class, to ascertain how far the lesson is recollected and comprehended. The references may be left to the last, each pupil being called upon in relation to read a passage and state the nature of the fact as it was expressed in the lesson.

THIRD LESSON.

1st. Creation. The origin of the universe; Gen. i. 1: Primary state of the earth—Gen. i. 2: First day's work, Light, distinction of day and night—vs. 3-5: Second day's, Air—vs. 6-8: Third day's, Land and water, plants—vs. 9-12: Fourth day's, Sun, moon, and star light, the seasons—vs. 14-19: Fifth day's, Animals of water and air—vs. 20-23: Sixth day's, Land, animals, man and woman—verses 24-31.

2d. Eden (DELIGHT). It is supposed to have been situated near the head waters of the Euphrates, Tigris, Araxis and Phasis—Gen. ii. 8-14: Man placed in it to till it—vs. 15: Restriction placed upon him—vs. 16-17.

3d. The fall. Eve tempted—Gen. iii. 1-6: Adam not deceived—1 Tim. ii. 14: Their Punishment—Gen. iii. 16-19: Promise of the Saviour, vs. 15: Expulsion from Eden vs. 23-24.

4th. The Murder of Abel. Employment of Cain and Abel—Gen. iv. 2: their offerings—Gen. 4-7, and Heb. xi. 4: Murder of Abel—Gen. iv. 8: Punishment of Cain—vs. 11-12: its mitigation—verse 15.

5. Corruption of Mankind. The intermarriage of the two races—Gen. vi. 1-4: Wickedness of men—vs. 5-7.

6th. The Deluge. Why it was sent—Gen. 13: its duration—Gen. vii. 11, and viii. 13: its extent—Gen. vii. 18-20: Persons saved—Gen. vii. 23.

A. H. M.