

GOLDEN TRUTHS.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF 1877.

BY REV. THORNLEY SMITH.

OCTOBER 7. Morning. JEHOWAH TELLS HIS PEOPLE. (Exod. xvi. 1-18.) Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and seventy palm-trees, has been identified with a place in the Wady Ghuruel—a lovely oasis in the wilderness, whence the children of Israel journeyed to the desert of Sin, where they arrived on the fifteenth day after their departure from Egypt. This desert was a sandy table-land leading to Sinai; and no wonder that in such a locality the people should want food. Instead of trusting to God, however, as they well might after such displays of His power, they murmured, and looked back to Egypt. There they had plenty, now they were ready to die for hunger. Yes; but they forgot that they were slaves. Jehovah promised (ver. 4) that He would rain bread from heaven for them, which they should gather every day, according to the need of each person; but on the sixth day they should gather twice as much, since on the Sabbath there would be none (ver. 25). This glad news was communicated to the people by Moses and Aaron, and they told the people what they were to do (ver. 6). God had heard their murmurings, and He would manifest His glory, first in the cloud which was over the tabernacle, perhaps by some special shining forth of the light, and next by the food He would miraculously supply, giving them bread in the morning and flesh in the evening; and thus they would know that they had murmured against Him. When people murmur at their trials, it is against God that they murmur (ver. 13). That evening came a vast flight of quails, and covered the camp. The quail is a bird of the grouse family, which twice a year crosses the Mediterranean and the Black Seas in vast multitudes. These quails were sent by the special providence of God. They came again at a later period (Num. xi. 4). In the morning (ver. 13) the dew lay about the camp, and when it was gone up a small round thing like hoarfrost was sent. "What is this?" said the people, "*man-hu*." And Moses told them it was the bread which Jehovah had given to eat (ver. 16). Each man was to gather an omer (about five pints) every day for himself, and for each member of his family, and thus each family had enough. The taste of it was like wafers made with honey, or, according to Numbers xi. 8, resembled that of fresh oil. It was a type of the bread of life (John vi. 33, the memory text).

Afternoon. PAUL AT CESAREA. (Acts xxi. 1-19.) From Miletus Paul and his companions, including Luke, sailed to Coos, a small island near, next to Rhodes, another island, and then to Patara, on the coast of Lycia. Here they found a ship bound for Phœnicia, and in it they sailed, and leaving the island of Cyprus on the left, they landed at Tyre, on the Phœnician coast, for there the ship was to unlade her cargo (ver. 47). Here they tarried seven days with certain disciples, who tried to dissuade Paul not to go up to Jerusalem. From Tyre they took another ship, but before embarking knelt down on the shore with their friends, including their wives and children, and prayed, and then took leave of them—a beautiful sight!—"and they returned home again." They reached Ptolemais, on the same coast, where they found other Christian brethren, with whom they abode one day (ver. 8, 9). The next day they came to Cesarea, and were entertained by Philip, one of the seven deacons (chap. viii. 26, 40). He was an evangelist, or preacher, and he had four daughters, who prophesied or spoke of Christ (Joel ii. 28). Cesarea was at this time a large and splendid city, and was so called after the Roman emperor. It was situated on the coast of Palestine, about seventy miles from the city of Jerusalem (ver. 10-14). A prophet named Agabus came down from Judea, and taking Paul's girdle, bound his own hand and feet with it, saying, "So shall the Jews do with the man that owns this girdle," etc. It was a significant act, such as prophets were accustomed to perform. The friends of Paul, and even Luke—for he says, *we*—besought him not to go, as did the disciples at Tyre, but he was bent upon it, and was ready to break his heart at the thought of not going. He had a work to do there, and no fear of bonds or of death could deter him. His friends said no more, but—"The will of the Lord be done." If *duty* calls us to any place, we are bound to go, whatever dangers may await; yet we must be satisfied, as Paul doubtless was, that such is the will of God. "The best means to help us out of all scruples and difficulties, is the

pure and honest intention to be ready for everything which Jesus will do with us" (ver. 15-19). Afterwards Paul and his friends packed up their baggages (not carriages, for they had no such things), or, as some think it means, discharged themselves from all earthly things, as if they were on their way to a better country, and went up to Jerusalem. Several disciples from Cesarea went with them, and an old disciple called Mnason, of Cyprus, with whom they were to lodge at Jerusalem, as he either had, or would take, a house in the city. This old disciple was no doubt a great treasure, as old disciples often are. At Jerusalem the brethren with whom they first came in contact received them gladly. These were not the elders, for they are not named until the next verse. The church at Jerusalem was the mother church, and James, called the brother of our Lord, was its bishop, or chief pastor (chap. xii. 17, xv. 13). In his house a meeting of the elders was held to receive Paul's account of himself. Memory text, chapter xx. 24, in which St. Paul expresses the same noble spirit of self-sacrifice.

October 14. Morning. ISRAEL AT REPHIDIM. (Exod. xvii.) Rephidim means *the resting-place*, and was perhaps identical with the great plain Er-Rahah, near Horeb. Here there was no water, and again the people chided with Moses. They were almost ready to stone him, as if he were the cause of all their troubles. He appealed to Jehovah, and was commanded to take his rod, and to smite with it a certain rock, out of which water should gush. He did so, and the promise was fulfilled. This was another wondrous miracle, to which frequent reference is afterwards made in the Bible. (Is. cv. 41, cxiv. 7, 8). Moses called the place "*Massah*," that is, temptation; and "*Meribah*," that is, chiding, or sharp, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?" That rock typified Christ, who was with the Israelites, and accompanied them through all their journeys. This is the meaning of 1 Cor. x. 4, the memory text: "And Christ is our rock." The living water comes from Him. The Holy Spirit flows to us through Him (ver. 8-16). At Rephidim the first battle was fought. A nomad clan of the Amalekites came down upon the Israelites, and attacked the feeblest of them. They were a people descended from Esau (Gen. xxxvi. 12). Joshua, who is here mentioned for the first time, was chosen as the leader of a well-selected army, to go out and meet them. Moses stood on an elevated place, from which he could see the army, and lifted his hands in prayer for its success; but his hands became heavy, and he sat down on a stone, and Aaron and Hur held them up, until the going down of the sun. Perhaps, also, he bore a kind of signal or banner to inspire the warriors with courage. Amalek was discomfited. It was a glorious victory, and it was written for a memorial in a book, and rehearsed in the ears of Joshua, because God declared that He would blot out Amalek from under heaven. (See 1 Sam. x. 9; xxx. 17; 1 Chron. iv. 42, 43). Moses built an altar, and called it *Jehovah-Nissi*, that is, "Jehovah is my banner." All the honour of the victory was thus ascribed to God, and the spot where the first military triumph was won was consecrated to the Lord. Its exact site has not been ascertained, but it would be often visited or talked about by the Israelites as we talk about Waterloo to-day. (See "History of Moses," p. 180.)

Afternoon. PAUL AT JERUSALEM. (Acts xxi. 27-40.) Certain Jews from Asia Minor saw Paul and others in the temple, and stirred up the people on the ground that he had brought Greeks, or Gentiles, into it, and had thereby polluted the holy place that is the court of the Israelites. Was this true? They had seen Trophimus, an Ephesian, in the city, and they imagined that Paul had taken him into their holy place; but it was false. The whole city, however, was moved by these fanatics, and they dragged Paul out of the temple, and the doors were immediately shut. They were about to kill him, when Claudius Lycias, the military tribune of the city, and the commander of the Roman garrison in the tower of Antonia, heard of the tumult, and came and rescued him. (See chap. xxiii. 26.) Bound in two chains (ver. 33) he was led to the camp, or the barracks near the castle, and then when he came to the steps which connected the fortress with the temple area, the soldiers were compelled to guard him from the violence of the people. He was led into the castle, out of the reach of the people, when he said to the captain, with his usual courtesy, "May I speak with thee?" The captain was astonished at his being able to speak Greek, and asked him if he was the Egyptian who awhile ago had made