

holy joy, and he and his household are baptized. His house adjoined the prison, or was part of the same building. Contrast his conversion with that of Lydia. What followed? The earthquake had alarmed the magistrates, and they sent the jailer a message that Paul and Silas were to be released (ver. 35-39). But Paul refused. They were Romans, and had been condemned unjustly. The magistrates were therefore amenable to a higher court, and Paul, standing upon the rights of citizenship, refused to leave the prison unless they themselves would come and fetch them out. Thus their pride was humbled. Being released—(ver. 39, 40)—they joined the little church in Lydia's house, comforted the brethren, and left the city. But they had sown immortal seed, and the jailer had learned a new song (Ps. xi. 3).

**August 19 Morning. THE FIRST PLAGUES.** (Exod. viii. 14-25.) Pharaoh first hardened his own heart, and then God hardened it by simply letting him alone. He would not let the people go, and now came the first plague. The Nile was the sacred river of the Egyptians, and was worshipped daily. Pharaoh went out in the morning to see how high it had risen, and to offer homage to the god it represented. Moses went at the same time with his rod in his hand, and threatened to turn the waters into blood. (Cf. 2 Kings iii. 22.) When the waters of the Nile are low they assume a green colour, as they rise they become red, in which state they are wholesome to drink. This change is supposed by some to be caused by cryptogamic plants and infusoria. Now, this natural change becomes a supernatural one, and the Red Nile, as the people called it, became red with blood. Hence the fish died, and hence the Egyptians could not drink of the water. And this miracle extending over the whole of the Delta, for, included "the streams," or arms of the Nile; "the rivers" or canals; and "the ponds," or stagnant pools, so that there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt, in vessels of wood, and in vessels of stone. The Egyptians used to purify the water, but every attempt was now unavailing and they could only get pure water by digging in the sand round about. "The magicians attempted to imitate the miracle on a small scale, and apparently succeeded, but what a miserable imitation it must have been! (See History of Moses, p. 109.) Learn Jer. i. 10—God raises up men to pull down and to destroy, as well as to build and to plant.

**Afternoon. THESSALONIANS AND BEREANS.** Acts xvii. 1-15. Paul, Silas, and Timotheus on leaving Philippi, passed through Amphipolis, situated on the Strymon, and Apollonia, thirty miles further, and came to Thessalonica, on the Thermaic Gulf, a populous and rich commercial town. Here was a synagogue of the Jews, and, as his manner was (ch. ix. 20, xiii. 5-14), the apostle entered it, and for three Sabbath days in succession reasoned with them out of the Old Testament Scriptures. His affirming first, that the Messiah was to suffer (Isaiah lii; comp. Luke xxiv. 26-46); secondly, that He must rise from the dead (Ps. xvi. 10, 11); and thirdly, that Jesus, whom he preached, was that Messiah or Christ. Some Jews believed, and joined themselves to Paul and Silas, but many Greek proselytes were convinced, and not a few honourable women of Greek origin. But (ver. 5) the unbelieving Jews set the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, with whom the missionaries dwelt. Whether Jason was a Jew or a Gentile is not known. But he and some others were dragged into the presence of the rulers of the city, and were charged with what was deemed a great crime—"These that have turned the world upside down, are come hither also." (Cf. ch. xvi. 20 Luke xxiii. 5.) It was partly true, and the world needed; this great upturning as it does to this day. They implicated Jason because he had received the agents of this work. Both the people and the authorities were troubled, for the latter had no proofs of the facts alleged. They therefore took of Jason a money security, as the word probably means, and they let him and his friends go. Paul and Silas themselves had been sent away by night (ver. 10), whilst Timothy remained for a while behind. Jason, then, did not give any promise that he would no longer harbour the new teachers, but only that he would not adopt any treasonable plans. Berea, to which Paul and Silas went was the capital of Pellæ, the third district of Macedonia. Here the resident Jews were of a nobler disposition (ver. 11) than those of Thessalonica (1) because they received the Word readily; (2) because they daily searched the Scriptures. A beautiful example this, and a proof moreover that the more the Old Testament is studied, the clearer will be the evidence that it testifies of Jesus as the Messiah or the Christ. The result was that many of them

believed, and that not because of Paul's preaching merely, but because they found it agreeable with their own sacred books. There also were several honourable Greek women and a large number of men, who became converts. But the mischief-makers of Thessalonica came to Berea also, and tried to stir up the rabble (ver. 13). What will fanatics not do? The zeal of false teachers and of the enemies of the truth is often marvellous. Timothy had followed to Berea, and he and Silas remained there, but the Christians of Berea sent Paul away to the sea, Berea being near the coast, that there, in company of some of his friends, he might embark for Athens. Learn ver. 11, and do not only read, but search the Scriptures. They are a mine of wealth, but the wealth does not lie on the surface.

**August 26. Morning. THE LAND OF EGYPT SMITTEN.** (Exod. ix. 13-35.) Six plagues had already fallen on the land, but Pharaoh's heart was yet hardened. Now came the seventh, and at that period of the year when the people were anticipating the early harvest. The barley was in the ear, and the flax was just rising in the stalk (ver. 31). Again, Moses was commanded to go and stand before Pharaoh, and again to demand the release of the Hebrews, with another terrible threat if he refused (ver. 13-15). God had raised up Pharaoh purposely to show in him His power; and now the plagues He would send would penetrate the very heart of the people, and inflict a deadly wound. A grievous hail was threatened, but Moses gave the Egyptians warning the day before, and those who feared the Lord, brought home their cattle. The hail—hailstones were so large, and fell with such violence, that they destroyed everything; and the storm was accompanied with fearful thunder and lightning; but the land of Goshen was exempt. According to numerous travellers in Egypt, flax and barley are ripe in March, wheat and rye generally in April. The plague occurred then in December or January, and in those months the cattle are sent out to graze. This plague was the more remarkable, as rain and hail, though not unknown in the Delta, are rare—thunder and lightning still more so. For a moment Pharaoh relented; but again he "sinned yet more, and hardened his heart, he and his servants." (See Eccles. viii. 11; Ps. cii. 15.)

**Afternoon. PAUL AT ATHENS.** (Acts xvii. 16-34.) Athens, one of the chief cities of Greece, was given up to idolatry. The city was full of idols. Paul was indignant at the sight (ver. 16), and to oppose the evil, he began to converse with the Jews and proselytes in their synagogue, and then in the market-places daily, with them that met him. What followed? He encountered the Epicureans and the Stoics—the philosophers of the age, some of whom thought he was an empty talker, or one who, like a rook, has nothing to say though he makes a noise. Others thought that he announced new divinities, because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection. This last subject was to the Greeks most surprising, but they did not take the word *Acropolis* for a goddess, as some have thought. Areopagus—Mars Hill—was an elevated part of the city, where the highest court was accustomed to meet. Here they asked him, somewhat politely (ver. 19), to address them, and explain himself. They liked nothing better than to hear of new things. The apostle complies. He was in the midst of temples, altars, and statues "of gods; and he said to them, 'Ye men of Athens, I perceive that ye are excessively pious,' etc.—not 'too superstitious.' For among other altars, he had seen one with the inscription—TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. The origin of this altar is only conjectural; but it is supposed that the Athenians, thinking that there were deities with whom they were not acquainted, and whom it was needful to propitiate, erected it accordingly. It is said that there were several such altars in Athens. This unknown God Paul came to declare. He was 1. The Creator of all things. 2. A being not to be worshipped, or ministered to, by human hands. 3. The universal Father of the human race, all nations of which are of one blood. 4. The Being whom all should seek; and in whom all have their existence. One of their own poets—Aratus, born in Solæ of Cilicia, three centuries before Christ, had said—"For we are also His offspring." But Paul attributes this sentiment to more than one, probably having in view Clisthenes of Lycia, in whose writings the sentiment is also found. He therefore denounced the notion that God was like gold or silver, etc.; and he proceeded to preach repentance on the ground that a day of judgment was appointed (ver. 31-32). Thus far, he said, God had passed by these times of ignorance without any severe censure; but now a new era has come, and he commanded all men everywhere