

III. In various details; also in quoting from the Septuagint instead of the original; and in the freedom of his citations, Stephen had, as St. Jerome says, "regard to the meaning, not the words." His historical method vindicated his own orthodoxy, and gained him a hearing. Paul imitated his method: Acts xiii. 16-22; Acts xxvi. 22. Necessity of it seen Acts xxii. 22.

IV. LESSONS.—1. Value privileges, but do not depend on them; 2. Only faith in the living God saves—Faith in the Church, or anything outward, is idolatry; 3. The true way to reverence our "fathers" is to be filled with their spirit.

OCTOBER 15th.—STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM.—
Acts vii. 51-60.

Golden Text: Phil. i. 20.

1. Persons and place same as in preceding Lessons. Scene at first the same, except that there is a sudden change in Stephen's tone. Why? Either because his judges—beginning to see the drift of his defence—showed symptoms of impatience, or because he was carried away with indignation when the murder of the Holy One came up before him simply as the last and worst of a long catalogue of rebellions against God, and rejections of His sent ones.

II. v. 51, 52. See parallel passages.

v. 53. God gave the law; the angels, His ministers, announced it; the people received it with due reverence; but, with all their professions, they did not keep it.

v. 54-56.—The scene now changes. Hardly can the reverend judges restrain themselves. Their hearts are "being sawn asunder," and they gnash their set teeth at him: v. 53. Stephen is calm, but filled with holy boldness. He looks up from them to the open skies, and amid the ineffable splendour of the third heaven, sees Jesus. In every other passage, the ascended Jesus is said to be seated at the right hand of the Father. Here, it is as if "He had risen from His throne to succour and receive Stephen." "The Son of man"—the name used by Jesus before this Council, Matt. xxvi. 64, in foretelling His glorification.

v. 57-60.—The scene shifts rapidly now from the Council Chamber to a mob tumultuously hustling Stephen through the streets to one of the gates. Outside the city they go about the murder deliberately. The witnesses strip themselves of their loose outer garments, that they may do their work thoroughly, and one of the leaders takes charge of the clothes: Deut. xvii. 5, 7; Lev. xxiv. 14; 1 Kings xxi. 10, 13. Stephen,

now free from their hands, kneels down. The first volley is thrown. He feels the bitterness of death, but calmly offers to Jesus the prayer that He on the Cross made to the Father: Luke xxiii. 46. Another crash of stones, and summoning his last strength, he utters loudly another prayer in the spirit of his Lord: Luke xxiii. 34, and "fell asleep."

III. LESSONS.—1. Holy indignation against sin is not inconsistent with forgiveness and patience towards those that are sinning grievously even *against ourselves*.

2. Zeal for religion cannot excuse wrong doing. Our zeal must be according to knowledge: Rom. x. 2.

3. Jesus is ever near and ready to save. The eye of faith sees Him.

4. Jesus is the living God. Dying Stephen prayed to Him. So may we.

5. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church." "The Church owes Paul to the prayers of Stephen."

6. Better to fall asleep with Stephen than remain awake with his murderers.

OCTOBER 22nd.—SIMON THE SORCERER.—
Acts viii. 9-25.

Golden Text: Acts viii. 21.

This Lesson and the next, give us glimpses of Philip. Stephen's death was the signal for the outbreak of a persecution which scattered the infant Church. The dispersion led to the Church's first missionary triumph.

v. 9-13.—Philip and Simon are the central figures in these verses.

PLACE.—A city of Samaria, probably Sychar, viii. 5, and John, iv. 5. Philip, afterwards called the Evangelist, xxi. 8, was the second of the seven deacons. From the fact that the first extension of the Church outside Judea, Acts 1-8, and the first victory over Jewish prejudices was due to him, it would seem that he had the same spiritual and enlarged views as Stephen. The two days that Christ and His disciples spent at Sychar, John iv. 40, may have prepared the way for Philip.

Simon the Sorcerer was there before Philip, exercising a strange influence over all the people. Such an adversary Paul had, xiii. 6. Church history relates that Simon Magus fell a victim at last to his magic arts. Declaring that he would rise the third day, he was buried alive. There was such a thing as magic, Ex. vii. 11-22. Probably not now.

Simon sees in Philip merely a power over