

Lesson Word-Pictures.

We see the mob pressing eagerly up to the castle's strong walls. There are the stairs on which Paul is standing as he anxiously beckons to the mob and beseeches an audience. Between him and his baffled pursuers is drawn a grim line of Roman soldiers. "Hark!" somebody is saying. "He speaks to us in our own tongue." Away out to the edge of that assemblage, the noise gradually subsides like a wave dying as it rolls up the shore. When he speaks, his listeners bend forward, straining their eyes, straining their ears. They listen more sympathetically when he says that he is a Jew. He is going back over his previous life. He is a bigot, a zealot, a persecutor on his way to Damascus. He now paints before his auditors that strange highway scene. A band of pilgrims, they see in the hot, dusty road, and then comes that sharp glare of light suddenly bursting upon the travelers. They see the prostrate persecutor and his terrified companions. They hear the conversation with that strange One—with whom? The hated Jesus of Nazareth! There is an ominous mutter down in the mob. But

Paul goes on and paints his picture. The once proud persecutor is now abjectly, stumbling on, his eyes blinded, his hands stretched out for another's guiding. He is in Damascus at last, standing before one who gives him sight, and he is baptized. At Jerusalem next, in the stillness of the hour of prayer, he hears a mysterious voice sending him away from the holy city. He, the persecutor, go forth with the Gospel? He that consented to the blood of Stephen—but what is the matter? Why does one man clinch his fist, another shake his head, a third mutter, and many threaten with angry looks and gestures. And when he repeats those words, "Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles," what stir there is then! They, God's people, unworthy, and God's message to be taken to the unclean Gentiles! The insolent renegade! They will not listen. Like a breaker gathering violence as it rolls in from the sea, like the thunder crashing louder and louder as it sweeps through the clouds, rises and swells and roars the wrath of the people. "Away with such a fellow from the earth!" they are madly shouting. The whirlwind is again let loose in Jerusalem.

A. D. 58.]

LESSON VIII. PAUL BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

[Feb. 22]

Acts 23. 1-11. [Commit to memory verses 9-11.]



1 And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

2 And the high-priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to

the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high-priest?

5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, this

son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided.

8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.

10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

General Statement.

The throng on the pavement of the temple court listened quietly to Paul speaking from the stairs until he used the hated word "Gentiles." Then their rage burst forth anew. They screamed out curses and cast up dust in the vain attempt to reach at the apostle. The Roman officer in command had not understood a word of his prisoner's speech, for it was in the Hebrew tongue, but he concluded that one whom they all so determined to slay must have been guilty of some great wickedness. He ordered him to be taken into the castle, and scourged until he should confess his crime. As the soldiers were stripping off his clothes, Paul quietly informed them that he was a Roman citizen. This news filled his captors with alarm, for it was contrary to law to strike, or even to bind, a free citizen

without trial. He was placed in a cell for safe-keeping until the morning. Then the colonel commanding summoned the supreme council of the Jews to meet and inform him what the charges were against this man, at once a hated Jew and a free-born citizen of the empire. What a meeting that must have been when Paul found himself standing where twenty years before he had beheld Stephen with the shining face, in presence of the Sanhedrin of his people! Our lesson relates the events of the day: Paul's dignified, opening, the insulting interruption of the high-priest, the tact of the apostle, which perhaps saved his life until the Roman soldier could again come to his rescue, and his precious communion with his Master in his lonely prison, which doubly repaid him for the trials of the day.

Explanatory and Practical Notes.

Verse 1. Earnestly beholding. It was the first time that Paul had met with the council since that eventful day when he had listened to Stephen's address and aided in his slaughter. Standing in their presence, he looked earnestly upon the semicircle of faces, of which not a few were familiar. **The council.** The Jewish Sanhedrin, composed of the heads of the priestly order, the hereditary chiefs of the clans or families, and the leaders among the scribes. It was the supreme governing body among the Jews, but could not order any person to death without consent of the Roman governor. Paul was brought before it, not for a formal trial, but for an inquiry, and perhaps "the chief captain" Lysias

presided over the meeting. **Said.** As Paul was not on trial, and may have been himself a member of the body, he did not wait for accusation, but at once began his address. **Men and brethren.** This was the customary form of opening an address among the Jews. **I have lived.** Literally, "I have been a citizen," an expression referring to his citizenship in the Jewish commonwealth, having God as its head. **To all good conscience.** He remembers the time when he sat among them a persecutor, and he would impress upon them that then and now he was striving to follow his conscience. **Before God.** (1) *He should obey con-*