

V. 37. We were in all, two hundred and seven-six souls. Egyptian corn-ships sometimes carried twice as many passengers as were in this vessel.—*Josephus' Life*, sec. 3.

V. 38. Cast out the wheat, possibly the rest of the provisions, but more likely the rest of the cargo.—*Anno Bible*.

V. 39. A certain creek with a shore—i.e., with a beach or sandy shore. "The bay so justly known as St. Paul's is at the north-west extremity of the island of Malta (Melita), and is formed by the main shore on the south and the island of Salomonetta on the north. It extends from east to west, two miles long and one broad at the entrance, and at the inner end is nearly land-locked on three sides. The wind must have forced them to the west side of the bay, which is rocky, but has two creeks. One of these has a shore, the other no longer a sandy beach, but must have had one formerly."—*Hackett*.

V. 40. Taken up, rather, "cut away;" loosed the rudder bands, "the paddle rudders, one on each side of the ship, like long oars, had doubtless been hoisted up and lashed, lest they should foul the anchors."—*Hewson*.

V. 41. Where two seas met, "on account of the communication which the channel running between Malta and Salomonetta forms between the sea in the interior of the bay and the sea outside;" the forepart stuck fast, in a deposit of tenacious clay.

V. 42. Was to kill, a sad design of soldierly cruelty.

V. 43. But the centurion, and God through him.

V. 44. All safe to land, this was not Paul's first escape from shipwreck: See 2 Cor. xi, 25, written long before this time.—*Baptist Question Book*.

EXPOSITORY.

"The peculiar features of St. Paul's Bay are found accurately to suit the narrative of the shipwreck. 'A ship drifting W. by N. might approach Koura point, the eastern boundary of St. Paul's Bay, without having fallen in previously with any other point of the coast. The character of this point is such that there must infallibly have been violent breakers upon it that night. Yet a vessel might pass it, within a quarter of a mile, without striking on the rocks; and the soundings are precisely those stated in the narrative.'"

In the analysis of the lesson we observe the following points:—

I. THE APPROACH TO LAND. The expression translated "drew near some country" really is, "that land approached them."—(v. 27).

Explain how the sailors knew that land was near. Anxious watch was kept. They may have observed changes in the character of both wind and wave. Something indicated land before they actually heard the distant breaking of the surf. The skill of the sailor may moderate the dangers of the sea. It is God alone who "holds the waters in the hollow of His hand;" it is Christ alone who can speak to the storm His "Peace, be still."

II. THE ESCAPE OF THE SAILORS PREVENTED. In time of danger it is too often each one for himself. Only the nobler men, in the excitement of personal peril will see to others first. These sailors were self-seeking, and their mean scheme would have left the passengers to go down in the foundering ship. Their running away from duty should be a warning.

III. THE LAST MEAL ON BOARD THE VESSEL. Taken by Paul's entreaty. Taken by Paul's example: he encouraged them all by himself quietly eating. Taken with the comforting thought of God's presence and care. This Paul suggested by "giving thanks."

IV. THE PLAN FOR RUNNING THE SHIP AGROUND. Nothing could be done to save her. The only hope was to run her close inshore, and take the chance of removing the passengers. This put the prisoners in peril, because as every man

would have to swim or struggle for his own life, they might escape.

In contrast with the last battle for life, as indicated in verses 43, 44, the GOLDEN TEXT reminds us how tenderly God cares for the thousand ships that daily sail on the waters, and suggests to compare our own life to a voyage. He is our Captain Pilot.

LEARN.—1. To sympathize with all who are exposed to the perils of the sea. 2. Whether on sea or land, we have nothing to fear if we are "Safe in the arms of Jesus." 3. The trust we have in God should keep us calm and strong in times of peril.—*Notes on Scripture Lessons*.

DEC. 9.—Paul at Melita.—Acts xxviii, 1-10. A. D. 60, 61.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the barbarians; but to the wise, and to the unwise."—Rom. i, 14.

INTRODUCTORY.

Malta (anciently Melita) is fifty eight miles south of Sicily. It is seventeen miles long, and nine broad. It has been since the year A.D. 1860, under the dominion of Great Britain.

"The inhabitants of Malta were of Phœnician origin, and came from the Phœnician colonies of North Africa (of which the famous Carthage was the most important). They would therefore speak a Runic dialect, and on this account would be called 'barbarians' (v. 1, 4); as the Greeks applied this term to all who did not use their own language or Latin (compare Rom. i, 14; 1 Cor. xiv, 11; Col. iii, 11). It is worth noting that the part of Africa from which the Maltese came is still called *Barbari*. Malta was governed, under the Prefect of Sicily, by a Roman officer called *Procurator*, literally 'first,' and answering to our *Prætor* or 'Primate.' This title is not mentioned by classical writers, but has been found in an inscription on the island, and is the identical word used by St. Luke, rendered in our version 'Chief man.' Publius, too, is a Roman name."—*Engene Stock*.

EXPLANATORY.

V. 1. Escaped, in the ways indicated, chap. xxvii, 43, 44. A scene full of excitement and peril. They knew. "The bay, with the sea beyond, is, to the naked eye, visible from Civita Vecchia, five miles distant, the metropolis of the island at the time of the wreck." News of this large ship running ashore would soon spread. From the islanders the name would be learned; but it is quite possible that when the sailors came to look round in the daylight they remembered the coast and knew their whereabouts.

V. 2. Barbarians; only so called because they did not speak either the Grecian or Roman languages. There is no reason for regarding them as savage. For the Scripture use of the term "barbarian" see Rom. i, 14; 1 Cor. xiv, 11; Col. iii, 11. No little; no ordinary kindness. Such attentions they greatly needed after their long exposure. Contrast the treatment those wrecked used to receive on some parts even of our shores. Present rain. The fire must therefore have been made in some sheltered cove of the rocks. Cold. It was the month of October, and their drenched clothes would make them feel bitterly the coldness accompanying the storm.

V. 3. Gathered a bundle, of brushwood. Paul's activity throughout these scenes is very remarkable, and should be carefully noticed as indicating his character, and active, energetic disposition. A viper. This poisonous snake had hidden itself for a winter among the sticks, and the warmth of the fire aroused it to life again. Fastened on his hand, by coiling round it, but it also biting him is plainly implied.

V. 4. A murderer. This would be suggested also by observing that he was a prisoner.

They had a superstitious belief in a "supreme and restless avenging eye and hand." They thought, perhaps, that he was trying to escape justice, and now justice was overtaking him. So far they had hold of a great truth; they felt sure the guilty would be punished. We may remember the sentence, "Be sure your sin will find you out."

V. 5. Shock off. Getting preservation from harm by the fulfilment of the Lord's promise (Mark xvi, 18).

V. 6. Swollen, or become inflamed. Said he was a god, which was a more superstitious view to take than their former one. (See the conduct of the people at Lystra, chap. xiv, 13, 19.)

V. 7. Chief man, or first man. "This was the proper official title of the Maltese representative of the Roman prætor of Sicily, to whose province Malta belonged; two inscriptions having been discovered in the island, one in Greek, the other in Latin, containing the same words which Luke here employs." Lodged us. The Roman centurion could claim the aid of the resident Roman governor.

V. 8. Bloodily flux, an aggravated form of dysentery. And prayed; partly to show Publius that he did not put forth any power of his own.

V. 10. Many honours, gifts, of thankfulness. We may be sure that Paul did more than heal disease; he would preach Christ unto them.

—S. S. Union Notes on Lessons.

EXPOSITORY.

The following are the points of the narrative to which attention may be called:—

I. BARBARIAN KINDNESS. "By barbarian was meant, any nation but the Roman and the Greek—a contemptuous term, the spirit of which is common enough in all ages." But sympathy with the suffering, and readiness to help the distressed, may be found everywhere. Those shipwrecked need hospitality and attention, and now in every land meet with kindness and care. Natural human feeling leads us to care for the distressed, but true religion makes us still more tender, and humane, and self-sacrificing. Illustrate Christ's teaching of the Good Samaritan; and James ii, 14-16.

II. BARBARIAN SUPERSTITIONS. The religion was altogether one of fear. "The connection between guilt and retribution is the very basis of all natural religion." See the heathen, or pagan, ideas of *Venefica*, and of the *Furien*. These were true as regards the certainty of the connection, but they were wrong in thinking that they could fix the connexion in the case of the individual. Christ taught concerning this in Luke xiii, 4-5. But these barbarians were partly right in thinking Paul was a god: he could only fling off the viper through Divine power entrusted to him. We should be thankful for that, but for the light of Christianity which has delivered us from so many superstitions. The holy, loving fear of the heavenly Father lifts us up above "all fears beside."

III. APOSTOLICAL PERIL. Coming out of Paul's self-forgetting, earnest endeavours to help others. Coming suddenly and unexpectedly. No remedy known then for the viper's bite. A new kind of peril to the apostle. His trust in God enabled him to be calm and act for the best, even at such a time. He sought God in peril. When strong in God he was also wise to act. So often we forget this duty of seeking God first.

IV. MIRACULOUS HEALINGS. These were wrought to gain acceptance for the gospel among a people to whom it had not before been preached. Paul only performed miracles at particular times for special purposes. Show how miracles confirmed Christ's mission and teaching. Why do we not need miracles now?

LEARN.—That Christ's promises to His disciples were graciously fulfilled; even the one about "taking up serpents."