

GOLDEN TRUTHS.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF 1877.

BY REV. THORNLEY SMITH.

AUGUST 5. Morning. THE AFFLICTION OF ISRAEL. (Exod. v. 1-19.) The request of Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh was, at first, that he would let the people of Israel go and celebrate a festival in the wilderness. This was a natural and reasonable request, as all nations presented sacrifices to their deities, and Jehovah, the God of the Israelites, could not be worshipped acceptably in Egypt. Pharaoh's reply was, "Who is Jehovah, that I should listen to his voice, to let Israel go? I know not Jehovah." This was true, but, as Keil says, it was no justification of his conduct. The reply of the messengers was, that God had met them, and required them to hold the feast; and that they were in danger of being stricken with pestilence, or with the sword, if they willfully refused. In Egypt they might sacrifice to the gods of the Egyptians, but not to the God of the Hebrews. But (ver. 4-5) Pharaoh would not comply. He called the Israelites the "low-people," i.e., "the common-people," or people of the lower caste. (Jor. iii. 23; Ezek. vii. 27.) And he charged Moses and Aaron with encouraging them to indolence (ver. 6-9). The same day Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters, or bailiffs, who were set over the Israelites to urge them to their work, that they should no longer give the people straw to make bricks. Chopped straw, mixed with the clay, made the bricks more durable, and they were not burnt, but dried in the sun. The people were thus compelled to gather stubble where they could, and yet to make the same quantity of bricks as before. This greatly increased their burdens. By "lying words" (ver. 9) the King meant the words of Moses, that the God of Israel had appeared to him (ver. 10-18). The taskmasters were only too ready to fulfil this harsh command; and as the Israelites could not thus add to their work, they were beaten, and told that they were idle. They complained to the King, but only met with a repulse. This appeared to be severe chastisement, but according to the memory-text (Heb. xii. 11), it was intended to work for good.

Afternoon. PAUL SENT TO MACEDONIA (Acts xvi. 1-21.) At Derbe Paul and Silas found Timothy, a young disciple converted on the apostle's former visit (ch. xiv. 6-21). As his father was a Greek, he had not been circumcised, but St. Paul wished to take him with them, and had him circumcised for the sake of the Jews, who were so zealous for the law (1 Cor. ix. 20). The decrees (ver. 4) were those of chap. xv. 23-29, and were, no doubt, received by the churches with great joy. These decrees, together with the ministry of Paul and Silas, confirmed them in the faith, and many persons were added to their numbers. They wished to proceed westward to Asia; that is, the west-coast district of Asia Minor (ver. 6), but by some internal direction the Holy Ghost prevented them, for there was other work for them to do. They came to Mysia, on the north-west coast, and essayed to go into Bithynia, on the east of the Bosphorus and the Black Sea, but again were hindered by the Spirit. The set time for the visitation of different countries is determined, not by man, but by the Holy Ghost. Troas (ver. 8) was on the east of the Egean Sea, whence they could look towards the continent of Europe. In a vision Paul saw a man of Macedonia, who entreated him to come over, and he and his companions went accordingly. We suddenly occur here, which implies that Luke himself became their fellow-traveller. They embarked in a ship, and first reached Samothracia, an island thirty-eight miles west of the Thracian coast. The next day they came to Neapolis, a haven of Thrace, now called Cavalla. A distance of two miles brought them to Philippi, called the chief city, or the first city of Macedonia—that is, topographically, not politically; it was also a colony, for, though built by Philip, the father of Alexander the Great, Romans were now its masters, and had sent colonists to dwell in it. It was the first city in Europe in which the ambassadors of Christ preached to the people. The river (ver. 13) was probably the Gangitis, and here, probably in a tent or prosenach, the Jews and proselytes met on the Sabbath Day to pray. A few women were amongst them, and, among others, Lydia, a seller of purple dyes or fabrics from Thyatira in the Asiatic province of Lydia. Paul and his companions joined them, and preached to them the Gospel. Lydia's heart was opened—not by Paul, but by the Spirit—opened gently, not broken like the jailor's (ver. 27), and, already a Jewish proselyte, she

became a Christian, and was baptized. She was probably affluent, had a house and domestics, if not children, and when her heart was opened to receive the truth her house was opened to receive its messengers. She besought them to take up their abode with her, and thus her house became the first place of Christian worship in Europe. How great an honour! Some days later (ver. 15) a certain damsel followed them as they went to prayer. She had the spirit of a python, as the word divination means. Python was serpent at Delphi killed by Apollo, but subsequently soothsaying was so-called. The girl was probably a ventriloquist, and she was a slave, and brought her masters considerable gain. By a spirit of divination she spoke the truth, like the demons in the days of our Lord (Matt. vii. 29; Luke iv. 34), and often cried in the streets of the city as the servants of God passed along (ver. 17). Paul was grieved. But why? Not because he was annoyed, but because he was indignant at what he saw, and could not receive testimony from such a source. He therefore commanded the evil spirit, by whose agency she acted, to come out of her, and when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they seized Paul and Silas, dragged them before their rulers in the market-place or court, and charged them with troubling the city (ver. 18-20). Thus their triumphs began in Europe, but their persecutions also. Timothy and Luke were not molested. By this narrative all soothsaying or fortune-telling, including the absurdities of spiritualism, is undoubtedly condemned.

August 12. Morning. PROMISES OF DELIVERANCE. (Exodus vi. 1-13.) It was not surprising that the Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron as they did (ch. v. 20, 21). But God had not forgotten them, and when Moses went back to Jehovah he received these promises. "I am Jehovah," etc., and "Now shalt thou see what I will do." (Comp. John xiii. 7.) To the patriarch God had appeared only as El Shaddai—the Almighty; now He would appear as JEHOVAH, the absolute being working out His own plans, and faithful in the performance of all His promises. In ver. 4 we have all the covenant promises of Gen. xvii. 7, 8; xxvi. 3; xxxv. 11, 12 brought together, and God said, "I, who made that covenant, will keep to it. I have heard, I have remembered; I will redeem you, I will make you My people; I will bring you into the land I promised to your fathers." And if God says He will do a thing, it will certainly be done; for He (JEHOVAH) is the Being, and none can resist His will (ver. 9-13). Moses told the children of Israel all this, but they did not listen to him, *lit.*, for shortness of breath, or an inner pressure of sorrow which prevented them from breathing freely. As afterwards, so now, they were full of despondency and unbelief. But Moses himself was full of anguish, and when Jehovah told him to go back to Pharaoh, he said, "If the children of Israel would not hear him how was it probable that Pharaoh would hear him, as he was heavy of mouth or 'of uncircumcised lips'?" (see ch. iv. 10; cf. ch. vii. 1-15). But God gave Moses and Aaron a charge to complete their mission, and they must fulfil it amidst all discouragements. Ps. i. 15 is a precious memory text here.

Afternoon. PAUL AND SILAS IN PRISON. (Acts xvi. 22-40.) The magistrates of Philippi most unjustly beat them and cast them into prison, but the jailor went beyond their commands. Think of him. (1) *As a man*, he was cruel and unfeeling, and thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks. This was probably a cold, damp underground cell, and with their backs bleeding from the floggers' rods they lay upon the ground. Did they complain? No. At midnight they prayed and sang praises to God in such language as Ps. xxxiv. And the prisoners in the adjoining cells heard them, or, *lit.* listened. Then an earthquake shook the building, and then the jailor was about to be more cruel to himself. He had a sword by his side, and for fear of being put to death for not doing his duty, was about to commit suicide. Paul saw him somehow, though he could not see Paul, and cried out, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." Their bands were loosed, but they did not attempt to escape. Now look at the jailor (2) *as a penitent*. His conscience is aroused, he is afraid of a greater punishment than death; he is deeply humbled, and, calling for a light, he comes in, and falling at the feet of his prisoners—for he is their prisoner now—asks, "What must I do to be saved?" One thing only was their reply: "Believe," etc., for they saw that he was a true penitent, and was therefore warranted to trust in Christ for salvation. None but penitents are. Then see him (3) *as a believer*. He is thoughtful and compassionate (ver. 32). He is kind and generous (ver. 34). He is full of