



LESSON VIII.—Feb. 21.

The First Christian Martyr.—Acts vi. 8-15; vii., 54-60. Read chapters vi. and vii. Commit vs. 57-60.

GOLDEN TEXT.

'Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'—Rev. ii., 10.

Home Readings.

M. Acts vi., 1-15.—Stephen arrested and Arraigned.

T. Acts vii., 1-21.—His Defense before the Council.

W. Acts vii., 22-36.—His argument Continued.

Th. Acts vii., 37-53.—His Argument Concluded.

F. Acts vii. 54-60.—The First Christian Martyr.

S. Rev. ii., 8-17.—Fear None of these Things.

S. Rev. vii., 9-17.—Out of Great Tribulation.

Lesson Story.

Seven deacons, 'men of honest report and full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom,' had been appointed to carry on the routine business of the Church. Among these, Stephen is specially mentioned—a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost. The disciples were greatly multiplying, and a great many, even of the priests, were 'obedient to the faith.' Stephen seems to have been specially zealous, doing wonders and miracles among the people, and speaking and exhorting with great wisdom. The learned men in the synagogue disputed with him, and when they found themselves unable to prove him wrong, they got false witnesses to say that they had heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God. Then they dragged him before the council and brought the false witnesses to accuse him. But as he stood calmly before them, they saw that his face shone with a heavenly radiance—as the face of Moses had shone after being forty days alone with God—as the face of an angel. Then said the high priest, 'Are these things so?' But instead of answering directly the charge brought against him, Stephen, beginning with Abraham and going on through the history of the Jewish nation, the history with which they had all been familiar from earliest childhood, preached unto them Jesus. Saying that their fathers had killed or persecuted all those who had prophesied of the coming Messiah, and that now they themselves had crucified that very Messiah upon whom rested all the hope of the nation.

When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart—filled with rage, and gnashed on him with their teeth. He saw that they were desperate, but he was not afraid of them, for he had the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, with him, and looking up, he beheld Jesus standing on the right hand of God, the heavens were opened for him. But the council, mad with hate, stopped their ears that they might not hear him, and shouting with fury, dragged him out of the city and stoned him. And Stephen, as he felt the cruel death-blows, called upon God, saying, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then, forgetting himself in his anxiety for the salvation of his murderers, he knelt down and cried, with a loud voice—'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' Then he 'fell asleep,' and Jesus received him into glory.

Thus ended one of the sweetest and most glorious lives the world has ever seen—nay, not ended, for as the spirit lives in heaven, so the influence lives on earth, and the work laid down by this glorious martyr was soon to be taken up again by the young man, Saul, who 'was consenting unto his death,' as he guarded the clothes of those who had cast the first stones at Stephen.

Lesson Hymn.

The Son of God goes forth to war,
A kingly crown to gain,
His blood-red banner streams afar;
Who follows in His train?
Who best can drink His cup of woe,
Triumphant over pain,
Who patient bears His cross below,
He follows in His train.

A glorious band, the chosen few
On whom the Spirit came,
Those valiant saints, their hope they knew,
And mocked the cross and flame.
They met the tyrant's brandished steel,
The lion's gory mane;
They bowed their necks, the death to feel;
Who follows in their train?

The martyr first, whose eagle eye
Could pierce beyond the grave,
Who saw his Master in the sky,
And called on Him to save.
Like Him, with pardon on his tongue,
In midst of mortal pain,
He prayed for those who did him wrong;
Who follows in his train?

Lesson Hints.

'Synagogue of the Libertines.'—Those Jews which had been taken captive by the Romans and afterward made free, were called Libertines or freed men. There are said to have been about four hundred and sixty synagogues in Jerusalem at this time. 'They suborned men'—the word implies false witness. 'Against Moses.'—Moses was held in almost if not quite as great reverence as God, by these Jews whom our Lord had accused of 'teaching for doctrines the commandments of men,' and holding their own traditions as more important than God's Word.

'Blasphemous words'—blasphemy against God was accounted one of the worst of sins and punishable always by death. 'Against this holy place'—the temple. These are practically the same accusations which were brought against Jesus Christ, and with as little foundation. Notice the abrupt change of thought at verse 51, as though they had listened quietly until then, but had grown impatient and Stephen saw that he would be allowed very few more words.

'The Son of Man, Jesus Christ in human bodily form,' standing, as though waiting to receive His faithful servant. 'They stopped their ears,' not wishing to hear words which really seemed blasphemous to some of them. 'The heavens opened'—had their hearts been pure and holy, they too might have seen the glorious vision, but their hearts were filled with hate, and their eyes fixed on earthly things. 'They cast him out of the city'—not being allowed to put any person to death within its walls.

'The witnesses laid down their clothes'—their outer garments, to leave their arms free. The law compelled the witnesses to cast the first stones. 'He fell asleep'—this expression was commonly used in the early church. They bade one another 'goodnight' instead of 'good-bye,' so confident were they of meeting soon again.

Search Questions.

1. Give the Old Testament law for the stoning of blasphemers.
2. Did the Jews ever try to stone our Lord?
3. Give a verse from Revelation about those who have laid down their life for Jesus' sake.

Primary Lesson.

We are learning to-day the beautiful story of Stephen, a man who loved Jesus so much that he was willing to die for His sake. It is rather a sad story, too, for the wicked people did really put him to death because he preached about Jesus, and they did not want to know that Jesus was the Son of God, because they had crucified Him. So they called Stephen bad names and said he had said things about God that were not true, and that he must be stoned to death. And as they looked at him, they saw that his face was filled with glory and sweetness, just like an angel's face. Then Stephen told the high priest and all the people who were with him how God had promised to give them a King, who would be their Saviour, and then when God sent Jesus to them, they killed Him, instead of receiving Him as their King. Then they were very angry and ran at him and dragged him out of the city and threw great stones at him that hurt him very much. But he was not afraid of them because he looked up and saw heaven before him, and he saw Jesus standing on the right hand of God. He was glad to go and be with Jesus, so he said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' And then he was so sorry for the wicked people who were killing him, that he forgot his own suffering and prayed that these people would not be punished for killing him, but that

they might all be saved and come to know and love Jesus as he did. Stephen had the same sweet spirit of forgiveness that Jesus had when they killed Him. And the Lord answered Stephen's prayer in the life of the young man named Saul, who was afterwards called Paul, and who loved Jesus and did great work for Him.

Perhaps you wonder why God allowed Stephen to be killed, when He might have saved him, just as He sent an angel to take Peter out of prison. But God always knows best about these things, and it seems as though Stephen's beautiful trust and forgiveness, at his death, was what caused Saul first to see what a Christian life was. And I think that Stephen's life was like a little match. You know a match lights easily and then it sets fire to the wood, which does not light so easily. The match burns out and dies, but the flames which came from it burn on and on, until there is nothing left to burn.

Suggested Hymns.

'Sleep on, Beloved,' 'Safe Home, Safe Home at Last,' 'Only an Armor-bearer,' 'Am I a Soldier of the Cross?' 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,' 'Asleep in Jesus.'

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR TOPICS

Feb. 14.—'Our little worries and how to get rid of them.'—Ps. 121: 1-8; John 14: 1.

JUNIOR PRAYER MEETING TOPICS.

Feb. 14.—'The life of Moses: what are some of its lessons?'—Heb. 11: 23-29.

The Sunday School and Giving

We cannot well be too much concerned about the moral and religious training of the rising generation. The affairs of Church and State will soon be committed to their watch-care and safe-keeping. The welfare of the Church and the Perpetuation of our institutions greatly depend upon their early moral and religious training. The training they receive during the formative period of their lives has much to do in determining their character for time and eternity. The teachings of the Sunday-school are an important factor in training them in the way they should go. Their significance and importance are recognized more and more every succeeding year. This ever-increasing recognition will result in the formation of a well-informed, strong and symmetrical character. May we not hope that the next generation of Christians will be greatly in advance of any former ones?

Greater volumes of light and glory have fallen upon this day and generation. The Churches are waking up to the importance and necessity of having 'Holiness to the Lord' stamped upon their means and possessions. The principles, duties and responsibilities of Christian stewardship are better understood than formerly. This is an age characterized by frequent and munificent giving. Money flows into the Lord's treasury in a continuous stream. We are reaping the sowing of former years. The bread that was cast upon the waters is returning bountifully multiplied.

The work of the Sunday-school has evidently had something to do in bringing about this long- prayed-for and blessed reformation. The seed sown amidst tears and trembling is springing up and yielding a rich harvest to the praise and glory of God. It is an encouraging evidence of success, and should serve as an incentive to still greater diligence and faithfulness.

The duty and blessedness of giving should be properly emphasized in our Sunday-school instructions and efforts. We should endeavor to instruct the minds of our scholars, impress their hearts and influence their lives with the assurance that it is more blessed to give than to receive, and that 'the Lord loveth a cheerful giver.' Such instruction will be an antidote to selfishness and covetousness, and result in sanctified and liberal giving. All the benevolences of the Church should be laid before the Sunday-school, and financial aid solicited in their behalf. Great good would result from it. The benevolences would receive a fresh financial and moral impetus, our young people become more fully acquainted with the operations of the Church, and have repeated opportunities to exercise themselves in the duty and blessedness of giving. Many of our schools would respond freely, and consider it quite a luxury.

Will you try it in your school?
—Evangelical S.S. Teacher.