

Devotional Service.

By REV. T. J. PARR, M.A.

JULY 14.—"INDIVIDUAL WORK FOR CHRIST."

Acts 8. 26-30.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., July 8. Jesus and the Individual. Luke 19. 1-9
Tues., July 9. Healing Christ's call. Matt. 10. 1-2
Wed., July 10. The disciple's example. Matt. 10. 1-3
Thurs., July 11. To every man his work. Mark 11. 31-34; Rom. 12. 6-8
Fri., July 12. The responsibility of discipleship. Matt. 21. 21-26
Sat., July 13. Personal reward. Dan. 12. 3; 1 Cor. 3. 5-8

"One of the most significant facts in the history of the early church is the personal leading of each disciple by the Spirit of God. They needed divine direction then; and they surely need divine direction now. Our paths are far more numerous than were theirs. They were obliged to break up the soil for the first time, while we may follow in their footsteps. Yet every age has its peculiar conditions, and only God can teach and guide the Christian how he must proceed if he would win a worthy victory."

1. Who was the worker?—Not a great personage as one might suppose. Philip was only a simple layman, chosen with six others to look after the poor. He was a man of some qualifications, as any average man might be who makes the best use of his opportunities. He believed himself called to be a worker for Christ. He proved a willing worker. He seemed to be in the attitude of Paul, saying, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He figures in one of the few records in the New Testament describing the process of individual conversion. Being faithful in the discharge of his Christian duty, he became the precursor of Paul in his work, and his name will be favorably known as long as the Bible endures.

2. The worker was obedient.—The angel said: "Arise and go." He arose and went. It was enough for Philip to know what God's will was. Knowing this, he was ready to perform it. His faith must have been severely tested. He was preaching in a city deeply roused—a revival was in progress. The people of Samaria were in just the condition to receive the Gospel, and it seemed that he was the one appointed to proclaim it to them. But the angel commanded them to go from the revival city into the desert. Strange, indeed! Providential leadings are often extraordinary. But Philip knew whence the message came, and without question into the desert he went. Philip's guidance was in perfect accord with the Scriptures. Note that, young people! There are some people who claim that they are guided by impressions of one kind or another, whereas those impressions are utterly out of harmony with the written Word. Philip might well be prompt. His work was greater than that of the angel.

3. The worker was eager.—The entire narrative indicates the eagerness and earnestness of Philip. "Those who love souls as Christ did, find opportunities to tell of Christ's salvation. There are many openings into which the Christian might press with his message. No one lives where souls are still unsaved but God opens a way for him to carry the Gospel. Take the first step and God will point out the next. Be in earnest, and let your zeal be tempered with knowledge."

4. The worker had knowledge of the Scriptures.—A very necessary qualification

in order to do effective work for God. Philip had made no immediate preparation for the interpretation which he gave to the stranger. But he knew the meaning of the passage. He was ready for such emergencies, both by his study of the Word, and by his personal experience. He seized the heart of it, and opened its meaning to his hearer. The scholar felt, no doubt, that the teacher had the necessary knowledge, that he was in earnest, and in earnest for him. The teacher's heart was kindled by the Holy Spirit, which made his words living and potent. The great central theme of his teaching on this occasion was Jesus Christ, the Saviour of sinners. There are many graces and virtues and duties taught in the Bible as essential to Christian character, but the entire revelation of God is provided by one life. As the human body has arteries, veins, muscles, and various organs, but all are dependent on the heart's blood, which supplies the life, so the mighty complex system of revealed truth has for its central life—Jesus Christ.

5. The worker finds an opportunity.—When Philip went from Samaria, as he was commanded to do; and when the Eunuch started from Jerusalem for Ethiopia, neither had the least idea of meeting each other. Probably the last place where they would have expected to meet each other would have been the desert road to Gaza. But "it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." "Man's goings are of the Lord." These two were brought together not by chance, but by heavenly guidance. Philip was providentially directed to personal work for God; and the Eunuch was providentially prepared, and thrown in the way of his personal worker. To Philip it was a fine opportunity of preaching the Gospel, and of leading a soul into the light; and to the Eunuch, an equally fine opportunity of finding the peace of great relief, even Jesus, and with him the salvation of the soul. Leaguers, be on the lookout for life's opportunities, study their meaning, and endeavor to use them for heaven's purposes.

6. The worker secures a witness.—The result of Philip's conversation with the stranger, blessed by the Holy Spirit, was the conversion of a soul. And what a reward is the evidence that God makes the efforts of his faithful servant effective! Here is a man led from darkness to light, from slavery to liberty, from sin to holiness. Blessed achievement! To lead a soul into real fellowship with Jesus Christ is a work that angels might desire to accomplish. The Eunuch now becomes a witness for Christ in whom he trusts. He receives baptism, and openly confesses his faith in him who "was led as a lamb to the slaughter," the Saviour of the world.

7. The worker filled a life with joy.—The Eunuch went on his way rejoicing. The great desire of his heart was satisfied. So wherever this worker, Philip, goes, he leaves a trail of joy behind him. Samaria rejoices in his presence; so does also the desert. He left happy hearts at peace with God in many a home. Glorious work! What made this Ethiopian stranger rejoice? There are at least four causes, says Whitlaw, from whose work suggestions are found in the foregoing. This new believer rejoiced because—

- (a) He had found the true object of worship.
- (b) He had found the key to the Bible.
- (c) He had found a personal Saviour.
- (d) He had found a blessed Gospel for his conversion.

On his upward journey to Jerusalem he was only treasurer of Candace, the Queen of the Ethiopians; on his downward way he had become a treasurer of the King of kings, and was bearing to his benighted

countrymen riches more precious than all the wealth of Ethiopia.

POINTS FOR THE PRESIDENT.

1. Hand-picked converts, like hand-picked apples, are the best keepers.
2. Has your society done any personal work for Christ this year of grace 1901? If not, what sort of organization do you pretend to be?
3. Hold a short conference, at which Leaguers may give a brief account of their attempts to do personal work and their results. Announce a week beforehand.
- (a) Readest thou what thou hast?
- (b) Understandest thou what thou understandest?
- (c) Obeyest thou what thou understandest?
- (d) An affirmative answer is required from all true members of the Epworth League.

JULY 21.—"A STRONG WEA MAN."

Judges 6. 20-30.

HOME READINGS.

Mon., July 15. The weakness of strength. Luke 18. 18-27
Tues., July 16. Confidence that fails. 1 Cor. 10. 9-15
Wed., July 17. Humility that succeeds. Luke 18. 9-14
Thurs., July 18. Having, we, having all. Luke 10. 28-42
Fri., July 19. The weak made strong. Heb. 11. 31-40
Sat., July 20. When God is for us. Ps. 30. 13-21

A strong weak man—is this the brief biography of many human beings. He is a good man, but he has a violent temper, and he gives way to it," is the description given of certain individuals. "My! what a fine woman she would be, if you could only depend always on what she says," is a remark not unfrequently heard. "What an influential man he might be in the community, but occasionally he becomes intoxicated and spoils it all," constitutes the outlines of another character. "I could believe in her religion, if she did not spend all her time on dress and do nothing but plan for her own pleasure, never thinking of the unfortunate about her," is a statement that rightly condemns many a would-be young Christian. The ifs and the buts, what a difference they make when they point out weaknesses which should never exist! A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and a human character is no stronger than its component factors. Observe how this is shown in the tragic history of Judge Samson.

SHAPEING ONE'S COURSE ALOE.

It is strange that in the case of a man like Samson, entrusted with such an important mission and dangerous, we never hear of his prayer being offered for divine guidance. In David's case we often read of inquiry being made for the direction of God. Samson should certainly have taken a similar course. He ought in all his expeditions to have asked counsel of God. To take one's affairs into one's own hands, leaving God out of the count, is a most unsafe and perilous course to pursue. We cannot expect God's presence to direct us when his presence is not asked or desired. When there is no prayer, it is little wonder that there is much turning aside into forbidden paths. All God's children may be led by the good Spirit (Rom. 8. 14). Not a step should be taken in life without seeking the guidance of our heavenly Father. His hand in ours and ours in his—so shall we avoid the snares of the enemy. Samson was strong in physical power and determination, but was weak in dependence on God.

EXPOSURE TO TEMPTATION.

We constantly read of Samson as being among the Philistines, and seldom among the Israelites. It is most unsafe to be always breathing an atmosphere