

ears," that they might not hear what they regarded as blasphemy, and made a united rush upon him, v. 57. How far removed from a true judicial spirit! How utterly degrading to a court of equity! (c) In their murderous assault they showed outward regard to the Levitical law, and hence "cast him out of the city" (Lev. 24 : 14), and stoned him, although they had no legal authority to inflict the death penalty, John 18 : 21. (d) "The witnesses"—those who charged him with blasphemy, and who by the law must cast the first stone at him (Deut. 17 : 7) laid their clothes at the feet of Saul, a student with Gamaliel and a member of the Sanhedrim, Acts 26 : 10. He was also a consenting party to Stephen's death, that is, he approved of the act, ch. 8 : 1.

2. *The spirit and conduct of Stephen.* (a) It was a Christ-like spirit. We are told (Acts 10 : 38) that "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost;" and Stephen "was full of the Holy Ghost," v. 55. He was full of faith as well, ch. 6 : 5. Although martyred, he was victor, 1 John 5 : 4. By the eye of faith he saw "the heavens opened," disclosing the glory of God and the person of "the Son of man" invested with all power, Matt. 26 : 64. (b) In the true spirit of forgiveness he prayed for his enemies, "more earnestly for them," says Eusebius, "than for himself." Compare Luke 23 : 34 with v. 60 here. Christ's grace can make us able to obey His command, Matt. 5 : 44. (c) In this frame of mind "he fell asleep"—the Christian phrase for death, John 11 : 11-14; 1 Cor. 15 : 18, 51; 1 Thess. 4 : 14. His companions exercised faith and heroism similar to his in burying him with "great lamentation," ch. 8 : 2. This service of love involved them in peril; for it is recorded that "a great persecution arose that day," ch. 8 : 1 (Rev. Ver.). True Christians are ready to face danger and death for the truth's sake and through love to one another, 1 John 3 : 16. The "great lamentation" was natural. The human heart cannot but feel keenly sore bereavement. Stephen had been a tower of strength to the infant Christian church. He "did great wonders and miracles among the people," ch. 6 : 8. He was mighty in controversy

and defeated the representatives of the synagogues that set themselves in array against the church. His "wisdom" and "spirit" were too much for them, ch. 6 : 9, 10.

3. *The persecution that followed the martyrdom of Stephen.* (a) It is described as "great"—violent and persistent, merciless. (b) It sent church members out of Jerusalem, except the apostles. Their remaining in the city was not an instance of cowardice, but the reverse. They stood true to their orders to "tarry in Jerusalem," but perhaps were tardy in going to the regions beyond.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

By The Editor

"So like his Master," we say instinctively of Stephen; but perhaps this may better be the ending than the beginning of the lesson. A good beginning is that heroic figure (see last lesson) standing before the great semicircle of scowling judges, the faces of the witnesses dark with lying rage, and the face of Stephen "as it had been the face of an angel." How will such a man speak? And how will the trial end?

A slight sketch of Stephen's address will be better than detail. It was courageous and strong, for he told them things they did not wish to hear; but it was Scriptural and reasonable. His aim was to show them that God had been their God long before there was a temple, and that it is not a temple, but heaven, that holds God, that God's worship is spiritual, not a mere form. It was only when they were about to turn upon him, that he broke off suddenly into the sharp accusations of vs. 51-53.

Five stages in the awful tragedy which followed, may be marked:

1. *The raging of his foes.* Angry because accused of an unrepented crime (v. 52); frenzied in their thirst for this good man's blood, even as they raged for that of Jesus of Nazareth. Alas, for our poor human nature!

2. *The martyr's vision.* What can be finer than the contrast between v. 54 and vs. 55, 56? And what more graciously opportune than the vision of his Lord in heaven, when he was in so great peril on earth? Picture Jesus "standing"—the attitude of sympathy