

The Quiet Hour.

The Disciples Scattered.

S. S. LESSON—March 9. Acts 8: 3-13.

GOLDEN TEXT—Acts 8: 4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.

As for Saul, v. 3. The force that impelled Saul was his conscientiousness. He said afterwards (Acts 26: 9), "I verily thought that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth." He was wrong, but he was not knowingly wrong. When he saw his error, he showed the same zeal in furthering, which he was now showing in opposing, the cause of Christ. If every follower of Christ would sally forth to translate his belief into action, the world would soon be won for Him. Indifference is an abomination to the Lord. It is to the lukewarm church of Laodicea that He makes the threat: "I will spew thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3: 16).

Made havoc of the church, v. 3. Again and again its enemies have made havoc of the church. In its infancy the whole power of imperial Rome was hurled against it. The story of many a bitter persecution in modern times has been written in letters of blood. In the sixteenth century it is estimated that in France alone more than eight hundred thousand persons were martyred for their faith. During the same period, the cruel Duke of Alva boasted that in the Netherlands, besides the multitudes slain in battle, he had committed eighteen thousand to the executioner, and this because they would rather die than become traitors to the truth. In Scotland in the days of the bloody Claverhouse, eighteen thousand suffered death for their religion. What further proof should we ask that the living God is in the church, than the fact that she has triumphed over all these attempts to destroy her life? And how highly we should appreciate our religious liberties, when we remember the price that has been paid for them!

Went everywhere preaching the word, v. 4. These converts were "sowers who went forth to sow" (Matt. 13). Their seed was the word. Their field was wherever they might go. They went to Phenice, Cyprus and Antioch (Acts 11: 19), and, possibly, some as far as Rome, for Andronicus and Juina were disciples before Paul's conversion (Rom. 16: 7). Printing presses and railways and steamships have made it much easier for us to scatter the seed than it was for these early Christians. The Lord does not send a persecution to drive us into the great field of the world with His blessed gospel, but He has commanded us to "go," and unless in some way we are going, we are not loyal to Him.

And Philip, v. 5. Philip and Stephen were of like spirit. Stephen (Acts 7: 47-50) laid down the principle that the church is universal, embracing Gentiles as well as Jews. Philip puts that principle into practice by going with the gospel to Samaria. The Lord intended His followers to think of the church as broad enough to include men of every nation and condition. They were to learn that, if the Jews had received a special revelation, it was that they might share it with others, as we confine the light in a lamp to illumine the room, or a fire in the stove to heat the house,

There was much joy in that city, v. 8. Christianity is a religion of joy. Its chief apostle wrote, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice." This joy is not the mere lightheartedness that youth and health and good fortune bring. Sorrow is not forbidden to the Christian. He is not condemned for being broken-hearted at the loss of his loved ones. But to the Christian hopeless sorrow is impossible. He has always something left when he seems to be stripped barest of all his happiness. No one can rob him of his Saviour and his heaven. It is possible for him to "rejoice alway" because he rejoices "in the Lord."

They believed Philip. . . Simeon himself believed also, vs. 12, 13. What was the difference between the faith of these true converts and the faith of Simeon, which left him still "in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity" (v. 23)? In both cases there was the intellectual belief in the message which Philip brought. But in the case of the true converts there was a heartfelt sense of sin and need, to which Simon was a stranger. There is the difference in the two cases between the persuasion on the part of a drowning man that a rope thrown to him from the shore will save him if he lays hold of it, and his actual seizing of the rope.

They were baptized, v. 12. How proud, a few weeks ago, when the Prince of Wales visited our towns and cities, were men and women and children to carry the flags and wear the ribbons which proclaimed that they were loyal British subjects. Christ has appointed in His church two badges to distinguish His followers from the world. These badges are the sacraments of baptism, and the Lord's supper. It ought to be sufficient that He has commanded us to wear these badges of discipleship, to make us eager to assume them.

Wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done, v. 13. It is possible in our own day for men to be powerfully impressed by the growth of the church and its influence in the world, and yet not to realize their own personal need of the salvation proclaimed by the church. Mere wonder at the power of Christ will not bring us to Christ. It is apt to carry us further away from Him, as in the case of this poor sorcerer in his greedy and tateful plunge of greed for more power and more gain.

My life is not what I have chosen. I often long for quiet, for reading, and for thought. It seems to me to be a very paradise to be able to read, to think, go into deeper things, gather the glorious riches of intellectual culture. God has forbidden it in His Providence. I must spend hours in receiving people to speak to me about all manner of trifles; must reply to letters about nothing; must engage in public work on everything; employ my life on what seems ungenial, vanishing, temporary, waste. Yet God knows me better than I know myself. He knows my gifts, my powers, my failings, my weaknesses, what I can do and what I cannot do. So I desire to be led and not to lead—to follow Him. I am quite sure that He has thus enabled me to do a great deal more, in what seemed to be almost a waste of life, in advancing His Kingdom, than I would have done in any other way. I am sure of that.—Norman M. Lead

The Comfort of Satan.

BY REV. G. CAMPBELL MORGAN.

To my own heart one of the great sources of hope, in life and work and outlook, is to be found in the supreme conviction that I hold of the existence of actual spiritual enemies. Did I not believe in the existence of Satan and his emissaries, then I must believe that all the dark and dreadful deeds that smirch the page of human history have their origin in human nature. This I do not believe. Outside our planet there is evil, sin, wrong; these are not the natural products of that great creation of God, of which we form not only a part, but the crown and glory. Evil is not indigenous to the soil of the earth; it is an importation, and its existence in other realms is a mystery, absolutely beyond the possibility of our explaining or understanding.

The Lord's Prayer.

Beecher once said, "I used to think the Lord's Prayer was a short prayer; but, as I live longer, and see more of life, I begin to believe that there is no such thing as getting through it. If a man in praying that prayer were to be stopped by every word until he had thoroughly prayed it, it would take him a life-time."

There are a great many who think as Beecher once thought, that this is an easy prayer to pray, and they repeat it day after day, and week after week, with scarcely a thought of its meaning and its pledges. One needs only to take time to analyze it, petition by petition, and clause by clause, to see how wide its scope and how tremendous its meaning. It embodies a whole system of theology, and defines the entire relation of man to God. First, there is sonship, then reverence and entire submission, after that dependence for temporal good, then the condition of forgiveness acknowledged, and guidance and protection sought.

The man who can pray it from the heart, realizing that each petition is a pledge to do his part in bringing that for which he asks, is drawing very near to the Father in heaven and his religion is fixed on a basis which gives it a sure and a precious foundation. God is his father, not merely a sovereign or a judge, meting out punishment to the offender, but full of tender mercy and compassion, seeking to help and ready to forgive, caring for the body as well as for the soul; but while the Father, still the King, whose name must be revered, whose kingdom must come, and whose will must be done on earth as it is in heaven.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God," John wrote; and Paul said, "If children then heirs; heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ." The Lord's Prayer means all this and more, and yet men repeat it as a parrot might repeat its lesson, saying the words in private devotions, or in the services of the church with scarcely more thought of its meaning than a phonograph might have.

The elder Booth is said to have declared that no man on earth could repeat this prayer as it should be repeated to bring out its meaning; while his son Henry, after years of study, melted an audience of friends to tears by rendering it.

It is the most precious prayer men utter, and covers all the range of human life; it is the model for all others, given by the Lord himself, and, as we pray it, we need to realize the meaning of our prayer, and to make it the expression of the worship and devotion of our hearts.—The Christian Observer.