

Our Young Talks.

Weeding the Onion Bed.

The days were long, and the sun shone hot upon Farmer Goodson's garden spot.

"Woe's grow space," the old farmer said, leisurely viewing each garden bed.

But then, in some places, 's I ought to know, there's nothing so certain as the weeds to destroy.

The day was hot, and the beds were dry, as garden beds are in late July.

Off and again as the day wore by, till the sun went down in the western sky.

At last, years have journeyed and gone since then, and Ned is a man in the world of men!

The Windsor Castle of To-Day.

The Queen still comes to Windsor for some part of the year, and now and then a foreign prince makes a brief visit.

But our Castle, hospitable and calm in its stately old age, does not resent even this desertion.

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The Morning and Evening Star.

"Fairest of stars, last in the train of night, if better thou belong not to the dawn,

All through the spring months, and onward to the end of June, the evening star shone brightly in the west.

For rather more than eight months you see it in the evening, getting brighter and brighter, slowly, for the first seven months.

morning star continually, and always changing in brightness in the way just described.

The star which shows those strange changes is called by astronomers Venus, and is the most beautiful of all the stars.

Intelligence of Female Missions.

Extract from a letter written by Miss Crouch, of the American Presbyterian Board.

You ask if I will write to you about the different departments of our work, or ask some of the other sisters to do it.

These schools, ten in all, are our work and our working force of three seems rather weak, but, as dear Mrs. Happer says, we will "hold the fort."

The dear training-school is my chosen work. Its great design is to train women for teachers and Bible-readers.

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Sabbath School Teacher.

LESSON XL.

Oct. 1. } STEPHEN'S DEFENCE. { Acts vi. 1-19.

COMMIT TO MEMORY VS. 1-5. PARALLEL PASSAGES.—Gen. xii. 1-3; Ex. i. 1-8.

SCRIPTURE READINGS.—With v. 1, compare Matt. xxv. 02; with vs. 2-1, read Heb. xi. 8; with v. 6, read Gen. xvii. 8.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Whoso loveth his father, and of whom, as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.—Rom. ix. 5.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—"The Lord sent redemption unto his people." We now resume New Testament studies.

We have reached the point where other defenders of the truth are raised up to extend the work of the apostles (Stephen's history should be recalled from lesson on Acts vi.), and to-day we have to examine a most important speech made in defence of Christianity.

The charge against Stephen, and with him against the new doctrine, is that of changing (Acts vi. 14), "the customs." One of two answers would be sufficient.

(a) How complete is the defence of the early Christians to the Old Testament; (b) How they take it, not as parable, but as simple history;

(c) How the Scriptures were in use among the Hebrews in the Greek translation, and how a translation into the language of the people is thus sanctioned by the Holy Ghost.

(d) The manner of Stephen was inoffensive. There is no insolence, or contempt, which never advances a good cause.

1. ABRAHAM'S CALL from Mesopotamia (the region between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates), his native country, afterwards more precisely renewed.

See Illustration, Terah's Age, p. 155. The argument on this is in v. 6. "You blame us for change, as if this whole system had been from the beginning!

(V. 8.) Still another change—the setting up of circumcision, as a sign in the flesh of the patriarchs that they belonged to God.

(V. 9.) Introduces another change—Joseph sold in envy. This is a new line, not so much dwelt on as suggested.

(V. 11-16) records the steps by which Joseph's removal to Egypt led to the whole family going thither, as we have the narrative at length in the closing chapters of Genesis.

(V. 18) and (v. 14) the migration of Jacob and all his kindred into Egypt, where he and they died (v. 15), and were buried, he in Machpelah (Gen. i. 13), the patriarchs in Shechem (Joshua xlv. 22).

As to the difficulty—"which Abraham," when it was Jacob that bought from the Shechemites (Gen. xxxiii. 19), it is easiest and most free of difficulty to regard it as a concise and general allusion, well enough understood by the hearers, to both purchasers—"which Abraham (and Jacob) bought of the sons of (Heth and) Emmer." (See Alexander.)

III. THE PREPARATION FOR MOSES.

One more step—as the time for fulfilling the promise or oath (Gen. xxii. 17) drew nigh, the Lord's blessing prospered and increased the people, so that when a new king, reigning family, probably, came to the throne, ignorant of Joseph's services and the history of the Hebrew settlement in the land, their growing numbers raised fear and provoked steps from repressing and enslaving them.

The aim of Stephen in recalling and so arranging these facts, seems to have been to show that through manifold and most startling changes God had already fulfilled His plans, and no surprise need be felt if yet other changes were a part of that plan.

(1) The place and value of Old Testament History. We should be at pains to know it. Defences of the New Testament doctrine rest upon it.

(2) The mystery of providence. It requires time, often long time, to unfold its purposes. Christians have to wait. But they wait not in vain. "God moves," &c.

SUGGESTIVE TOPICS.

Stephen—his character—office—ability—schemes—the tone of his defence—style of address—nature of argument founded on what—the book quoted—why—the lessons from use of Greek Scriptures—changes dwelt upon—truths suggested though not uttered—the lessons to us.

LESSON XLI.

Oct. 8. } STEPHEN'S DEFENCE. { Acts vi. 35-50.

COMMIT TO MEMORY VS. 47-50. PARALLEL PASSAGES.—Deut. xviii. 15-18; Josh. iii. 14.

SCRIPTURE READINGS.—With vs. 35, 36, read Ex. xiv. 19; with vs. 37, 38, read Isa. lxiii. 9; with vs. 39, 40, read Ex. xxxiii. 1-4; with vs. 42, 43, read Amos v. 25, 26; with v. 44, read Heb. vii. 5; with v. 45, read Ps. xlv. 2; with v. 46, read 1 Kings viii. 17; with v. 47, read 1 Kings vi. 1; with vs. 48-50, read 1 Kings viii. 27.

GOLDEN TEXT.—Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second.—Heb. ii. 0.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—"The law is a shadow of good things to come."

When we remember the situation in which Stephen stood, we can the better see the point of the argument which the rage and malice of his persecutors cut short.

Having stated at length the preparation and care of Moses, and the declared divine will in reference to the people, he proceeds, as a follower and preacher of that Jesus whom they had rejected, to exhibit the parallel pursued by their fathers.

(V. 35.) Moses is emphasized by "this." He whom God chose they refused. One man spoke the common thought. He was a specimen of the rest. His aims were opened by Moses, and so he questions Moses' claims.

(V. 36.) THE REDEMPTION—a type of rescue from sin, by the same Moses, whose is divided into three memorable periods of forty years each (v. 23 and v. 30), the third of which is given to leading the people.

(V. 37.) Already one of Moses' words had been in the controversy between the disciples and the Jews (Acts iii. 22). Moses did not regard himself as the end, but a means towards it. He was to prepare for another "like him," in coming from the people; "like him," in revealing divine truth; "like him," in being God's instrument of deliverance; and "like him" in his claims to be heard, as from God.

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vs. 39, 40, show the different estimate put on Moses by God, and by the slow and unbelieving Israelites. God made him the means of communicating His mind to the people; by him gave the lively (life-giving) oracles, and sent His angel with him.

The particular instance of apostasy mentioned is in (v. 40); turning to the ways of Egypt—idolatrous ways. They wished for visible gods to lead them, not indeed to Egypt (though they did contemplate that step, Numb. xiv. 4), but on their way, although the God who led them till now could not be trusted, and as for Moses, they did not know what had become of him, "wot not" (old English). The ancient Egyptians and the Greeks carried sacred symbols before their armies.

V. 41 specifies the form their sin took. Man must have a supernatural leader, and he invents but little. The winged bulls of the East are now well known. They were worshipped as representing nature, and in a later time were copied by Jeroboam (1 Kings xii. 28). The ox is a symbol indeed of strength and labor, and it is the devil's way so to copy Gods ways as to caricature them and dishonor Him.

Their symbol was an idol-received worship and sacrifice. It was a mere creature, their creature, yet they rejoiced in it, and sacrificed to it. And this was a type of their way, a specimen of their temper.

V. 42 describes the result. "He was turned to be their enemy." They were joined to their idols, and he let them alone. This statement and the quotation "from the book of the prophets" (the minor prophets are sometimes so described, so are the prophets as a whole), implying (see Amos v. 25-27) that much evil mingled with the sacrifices of the wilderness, both in the objects regarded, the aims of the worshippers, and the want of a single eye to God. The question is a bitter taunt. "Was it to me, forsooth, or to the host of heaven, and the work of your hands, ye offered during those forty years?"

St. Illustration, Idolatrous Worship, p. 150.

V. 44 has apparently a double bearing. (1) There was no excuse for the idolatry of Israel. They had been provided by God's direction to Moses with fitting means of grace in the tabernacle with its "holy place," and its "most holy," where God promised to meet with them.

But (2) the tabernacle was a new institution, unknown to the patriarchs, and not permanent, but allowed to give place to something else, which he afterwards describes. It is a part of the same argument, or defence rather—another evidence that a change was not necessarily to be condemned.

For (v. 45) when our fathers came to Canaan with Joshua, of which the Greek form Jesus is here used, they brought the tabernacle into the territory of the Gentiles, which they occupied. This reference to the territory introduces the idea that they did not all at once acquire the entire land. Not until David's time was it secured, and during all this time God abode with the people in a movable tent, and then another change was contemplated, and without any blame.

For (vs. 46, 47) he (David) found favor, was acceptable before God, and sought leave to build (not a tabernacle, as opposed to a house) a fixed abode for the Lord. If it had been of such transcendent importance as is supposed by you (Stephen seems to say, though he does not put it in form), strange that David was not permitted to build it, but it was the work of Solomon.

Nor (vs. 48, 49) is it of transcendent and necessary value. God does not dwell in temples made with hands. There is no inherent sacredness in them. The forms of His service are by no means immutable. Solomon owned this (1 Kings viii. 27). "The very man who built the temple did not estimate it as you do." Then comes a quotation from Isa. lvi. 1, 2, which follows up and corroborates the language of Solomon. The whole passage admirably suits and confirms Stephen's argument. A temple was not needful. It is not an inherent sacredness. It is not an internal fixture. It may give place to something else. God intimates that it will be so; that He will dwell in and with each true servant, that He will discard these very rites, and treat them as idolatrous, for (v. 50) nothing material can be of so much value in His holy eyes as the work of His Spirit in an immortal soul.

We have taken pains to bring out the argument, and instead of indicating reflections, we shall enlarge a little the number of suggestive topics.

The time of Moses—the condition of the people—the preparation of the prophet—the periods of his life—his call of God—his reception by the people—his treatment by God—honor put on him—his rejection by the people—likeness to Christ's rejection—his prediction of Christ—how "like me"—the sin of Israel—how shown—how continued—how punished—the tabernacle—its displacement—its successor—built by whom—Solomon's views of the temple—Isaiah's—and the plea of Stephen founded thereon.

God's Family Mark.

Thanks be to God that we pass not through this world as if belonging to it. If branches of the Living Vine, we need pruning and cutting; if vessels meet for the Master's use, cleansing and purifying; if followers of the lowly Jesus, humbling and casting down; and if heirs of heaven, we need much tribulation before our robes are made white, and we can appear before the throne of the Lamb. Let us then rejoice when the chastening hand of love is upon us, and pray earnestly that no affliction may be lost, but that each sorrow may leave its lesson upon the heart, weaning us from earth, educating us for heaven. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth." Who then would wish to pass through life without this token of a Father's love?