

GOLDEN TRUTHS.

SCRIPTURE LESSONS FOR THE SUNDAYS OF 1877.

BY THORNLEY SMITH.

NOVEMBER 4. Morning. THE PEOPLE'S SIN. (Exod. xxxii. 1-20.) "Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image," was one of the commands which had been issued from Sinai (Ex. xx. 4), and the people, when they heard it, promised obedience. But already they had forgotten all, and because Moses was detained in the Mount with God (of. chap. xxiv. 18, Deut. ix. 9), they became impatient, and urged Aaron to make them gods. Moses had been their visible leader; now they knew not what had become of him, and so they must have a visible object of worship, and Aaron was requested to make a golden calf. And Aaron was unmanly enough to comply with their demands. Both men and women wore in their ears, partly after the manner of the Egyptians, golden ornaments, and these they took off and gave to him. He made a mould of clay, in the shape of a calf, melted these golden ornaments, and poured the metal into it; and, when cool, finished it with a graving tool, after the usual method. The calf was not made of wood, and then covered with gold; but cast in this manner, as the words evidently state. The art of casting metals was well known in Egypt, and the furnace requisite for making this calf could be prepared in the wilderness with little difficulty. And what said the people? An altar was built before this calf, sacrifices were offered on it, they cried, "These be thy Elohim, O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt" (ver. 4). From Joshua xxiv. 14 it is evident that the people, when in Egypt, had worshipped its gods, and one of them was Osiris, under the form of an ox—Mnevis. Now, they made a god similar to the one they had often seen, and thus they changed the glory of God into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They did not break the first commandment, but the second, for they still worshipped JEHOVAH, but in this idolatrous form; hence Aaron made a proclamation: "To-morrow is a feast to Jehovah." But they were highly culpable; and God's eye was upon them. Hence His command to Moses (vers. 7, 8). They had corrupted themselves, "that they sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play," for is, to eat and drink of the sacrifices, and then to dance round the calf, with shoutings and songs. Such was God's anger that He threatened to destroy them (vers. 9, 10); but mark the disinterestedness and magnanimity of Moses (vers. 11-13). The words, "And Moses he sought the Lord," etc., mean literally to stroke the face of Jehovah, and so appease His anger. And (ver. 14) Jehovah repented, that is, changed His mind accordingly. Moses went down with the two tables in his hand (ver. 15, 16). Joshua was on the mountain, but not on its summit, and as he descended he heard "the voice of the people in noise," which he thought was the noise of war, but Moses said, "No, it is the noise of antiphonal songs that I hear" (vers. 17, 18). As he drew near he was filled with righteous indignation, and dashed the tables of stone from his hand, and broke them beneath the Mount. Perhaps the act was a hasty one, but his spirit was full of anguish, and in fact the people had broken the covenant, of which this breaking of the tables was a sign. He then proceeded to destroy the calf by melting it down and beating it into thin laminae, or leaves, thus treating it with the utmost contempt. He then ground it into fine powder, and strewed it upon the water, or stream from the mountain, of which he made the people drink (vers. 19, 20; Deut. ix. 21). This was a symbolical sign that they would have to bear their sin and atone for it (comp. Num. v. 24). "Flee from idolatry," is the memory text (1 Cor. x. 14). *W^o* need the lesson to-day as much as did the Israelites then.

Afternoon. PAUL BEFORE FELIX. (Acts xxiv. 10-27.) Paul was now at Casarea, where the procurator, Felix, was then living, and before him the apostle was arraigned (ver. 1-9). The procurator permitted him to speak, and his address is full of courtesy, though not of flattery. He defends himself against his accusers, and affirms (1) that he was no disputant (ver. 12, 13); (2) that he was no heretic (ver. 14); (3) that his religion was that of the law and the prophets; (4) that he maintained a hope of the resurrection (ver. 15), and that he always acted as his conscience dictated (ver. 16). It was only twelve days since he went up to Jerusalem to worship (see ver. 11), and he had been absent several years, and came to bring alms for his people and offerings to God

(ch. xi. 29, 30, xx. 16), and in doing the latter he had not desecrated the temple, as his adversaries had affirmed, nor had he done any evil unless his declaration of the resurrection of the dead was such (ver. 17-21). Felix adjourned the proceedings, as the word deferred means, in ver. 22; for having been six years in Judaea he knew a good deal of Christianity, and would not condemn Paul. But out of respect to the Jews, neither would he acquit him, and on the mere pretext of waiting until the tribune, Lycias, came down, he postponed further inquiry. Paul was kept in custody, but in a relaxed form, so that he was permitted to receive the visits of his friends, and had some liberty granted to him in the prison itself. After some days (ver. 24) Felix came into the court again, or perhaps had returned to Casarea after a brief absence. By his side sat, on this occasion, his wife Drusilla, a daughter of Herod Agrippa I., and a very beautiful woman. She had been the wife of Azizus, King of Emessa, but Felix had, by means of Simon, a sorcerer of Cyprus, led her away from her husband and married her. She was not, therefore, his lawful wife, and the guilty pair were living in adultery. Observe, then, *Paul before Felix*. He reasoned (1) of righteousness or justice, and Felix was a judge who was acting unrighteously; (2) of temperance or sobriety, and Felix was a man of noted sensuality; and (3) of judgment to come, when Felix would stand before the tribunal of God. These were terrible things for the procurator and his wife to hear; and now look at *Felix before Paul*, for he is the man now under charges, and what is the result? *He trembles*. His conscience speaks and tells him that all the apostle says is true. God's Word is a two-edged sword (Heb. x. 12), and it pierced him through and through. But he procrastinated. Go thy way for the present, etc. (ver. 25); but the convenient season never came. He would have taken a bribe, and hoped to get it, though it was expressly forbidden by the Roman law, and hence he often sent for him, and perhaps intimated to him that for a sum of money he would set him free. But Paul was a poor man, and had he been ever so rich would have scorned to purchase his liberty in such a way. What became of Felix? In two years he was recalled by Nero, A. D. 60, having Paul bound to please the Jews. Of his after life nothing is known; but his wife Drusilla, with her son, were destroyed in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, which occurred in the year A. D. 76. Unhappy Felix! His name was the reverse of his character, and it is all but certain that both he and his paramour died ere a convenient season for repentance came. Now is the accepted time; and to defer this great work is to rush into the arms of death. Ver. 25 is to be committed to memory. They are happy—*felix*—who lay it heart and turn from sin without delay.

Nov. 11. Morning. MOSES' INTERCESSION. (Exod. xxxiii. 1-3; 12-23.) A plague fell on the people because they made the calf. (Chap. xxxii. 35) Moses had returned to the mount to plead on their behalf, and was now sent back to them to conduct them on their way to the land of promise. And God promised to send an angel before them, but would not Himself go with them, lest He should destroy them. (Verses 1-3; compare chap. xxxiii. 20.) This was sad intelligence for the people, and they promised to repent (ver. 4-11). Moses entered the Tabernacle, and JEHOVAH talked with Moses face to face as a man speaketh unto his friend. And now Moses pleads with Him for the people. God had said he would send an angel before them, but He had not told him who the angel would be. He reminded God of His assurance that he had found grace in His sight, and He entreated that it might be so, for the sake of that nation which was God's people (verses 12, 13). The meaning is, "If I have found grace in Thy sight, do not leave me in uncertainty as to the angel who shall go before us." Such was the boldness of undoubting faith. And what was the reply? Faith conquered, and God said, "My presence," *lit.*, "my face, shall go before thee," (verse 14.) The face of Jehovah is Jehovah Himself. His own personal presence, or the angel in whom His name was (chap. xxxiii. 20, 21), "the angel of His face." (Isai. lxiii. 9.) To make sure of this promise, Moses said "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence"—a prayer for every traveller to a distant land. The promise was repeated—verse 17—and now Moses prayed, "Let me see thy glory." He had already seen much (see chap. xvi. 7-10; xxiv. 16-17) and even now God had spoken to him "face to face" (verse 11), but he wanted to see more—to see the essence of God, but all that a mere creature could see of God and live, was His goodness, and God promised to make His goodness—a very wonderful declaration of it—(verse 19), to pass before