

proof of stark insanity, Festus knew of none. The judgment of Festus in respect to Paul is the judgment of the world concerning Christians in every age. Men may not say as bluntly as the Roman did, "You are crazy," but they are not slow in insinuating that a surrender of present good for the sake of visionary glory is down right folly. But the Christian's answer is as triumphant as that of Paul, "Let any one deny the facts if he can; this thing was not done in a corner. But since the facts are incontrovertible, the deductions from them are such also." Christianity rests on immovable historical facts, which eighteen centuries of progress have certified as indisputable.

The solemn truths which seemed to Festus, wholly ignorant of them, superlative folly, profoundly moved Agrippa who was acquainted with the prophecies and beliefs involved. Ignorance of religious things is a barrier to religious impressions. Knowledge of revealed truth lends power to a faithful appeal. It may be resisted, as by Agrippa, but then again it may become the soil into which a loving word, a word of admonition or prayer, shall fall as a seed and germinate into eternal life.

FOR THE SABBATH SCHOOL

International S. S. Lesson.

LESSON X.—GENTILES GIVING FOR JEWISH CHRISTIANS.—SEPT. 5.
(2 Cor. ix. 1-11.)

GOLDEN TEXT—"Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."—2 Cor. viii. 9.

TIME AND PLACE—Late in A.D. 57. Written during Paul's journey through Macedonia, probably at Philippi.

INTRODUCTION—After the events of our last lesson the apostle left Ephesus and went to Troas, on the seacoast, northwest of Ephesus, and thence sailed into Macedonia. He was there joined by Titus, who came to him from Corinth. His report of matters there, and especially of certain false charges made against Paul, led to the writing of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians, from which this lesson is taken. Paul had always encouraged the exercise of Christian benevolence wherever he had labored. He had once gone to Jerusalem with the contributions of the Antioch Christians for the poor of that city, and he was now carrying out a plan to secure from the Gentile churches further aid. In seeking aid in this work from the Corinthian Christians he sets forth the great principles of Christian benevolence.

VERSE BY VERSE.—1. "As touching."—Concerning. "Ministering to the saints."—This refers to a collection for the Christian poor of Judea, which Paul was taking up in all the Gentile churches. "Saints."—Literally, *holy ones*; a common name for the disciples of Christ in the Acts and Epistles. "Superfluous."—Unnecessary, because he had already instructed them in this duty, and they had already shown their readiness to perform it.

2. "Forwardness."—The Revised Version reads, *readiness*. When Paul had visited them they were eager to give, and Paul had boasted of the fact. "Them to Macedonia."—The Christians in Macedonia, as at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. "Achaia."—The Roman province, which included Greece, where Corinth was. "Your zeal hath provoked."—Stirred them up to do likewise.

3. "Sent the brethren."—Paul had sent Erastus and Titus, and probably Luke, to remind them of the matter and prevent their neglecting it.

4. "Ashamed."—For not having fulfilled their promise.

5. "Your bounty." The gifts the Corinthian Christians had promised. "Not as of covetousness."—Or extortion, not as something which they were forced to give.

6. "Soweth sparingly."—Christian giving is likened to sowing seed for a harvest. He that sows but little shall reap but little, etc.

7. "As he purposeth in his heart, so let him give."—Giving should be not of impulses, but according to some fixed, well-considered plan.

8. "All grace."—Grace is favor, gift, whether temporal or spiritual. God is able to give the means by which we may exercise the grace of giving. "Having all sufficiency."—All things necessary for our own needs, and to give to others.

9. He hath dispersed, etc.—This is a description of one who is a cheerful giver.

10. "Now he that ministereth."—In the Revised Version this is not a prayer, as in the Authorized Version, but simply a statement of fact.

11. "Enriched in everything."—Temporally and spiritually. "Bountifulness."—Liberality. They would be enriched that they might be liberal givers. "Through us."—As the administrators of the gifts. "Thanksgiving to God."—Thanksgiving for the gifts and for the grace that prompted the gifts.

THOUGHTS.—Effective appeal was an art well understood by Paul. He knew how to touch the chords of the human heart, and make them vibrate almost at his will. One secret of this was his sincerity. His soul was filled with fiery zeal for the Gospel of Christ, and for his Lord and Master. He was ever on the lookout for ways and means to advance this cause. He was a born organizer, and he turned this talent to good purpose in the formation and training of the churches.

Dishonorable motives form no basis of his appeals. He does indeed seek to arouse their ambition, but it is an ambition in holy service. Unselfish impulses, rather than selfish ones, are roused.

Niggardly sowing is poor economy in both the affairs of this world and in those of the kingdom. A farmer spoils all his hope of a profitable harvest if he scatters his seed with too sparing a hand. If we withhold our offerings to God's cause, we have no seed sown to bring forth a harvest of blessing. It shows a lack of faith in God to be afraid to give Him of what He has given us. Paul tells us that He is able to "increase the fruits of our righteousness."

To ascertain how much we ought individually to give, let us turn to the New Testament, and there study carefully the teachings and practice of Christ and His immediate followers. Whatever of self-denial, of self sacrifice, of consecration of every power and possession to the salvation of men and the victory of Christ that marked their career, is equally binding upon Christians to-day.

The rewards of liberality promised to the Corinthians by Paul are three-fold. They are, first, the love of God; second, a spirit abounding to every good work; third, thanksgiving on their behalf. Note that they are all spiritual. God does give material rewards to those who give cheerfully and unatintedly, but Paul lays little emphasis on these. If you give, expecting it back again, there is no sacrifice; and sacrifice is what God requires.

Paul's prayer at the close is characteristic. He carries on the figure of the sower used in verse 6, and beautifully mingles the material figure with the spiritual meaning. The climax of the chapter is found in the last verse, crowning all that precedes it with glorious emphasis. "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift!" It is as if he would say: "Our best gifts are only a faint imitation of the unspeakable gift of God in His Son." Having received this matchless gift, let us do all in our power to bless and aid others. In so doing we will not only confer a great blessing, and make our own lives a "praise in the earth," but we will realize an increase of the gift in our own souls, thus fitting ourselves for still greater usefulness among our fellow-men.

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR.

DAILY READINGS.

First Day—Christ though rich became poor for us.—2 Cor. viii. 1-12.

Second Day—Our abundance should supply other's wants.—2 Cor. viii. 13-24.

Third Day—Gentiles giving for Jewish Christians.—2 Cor. ix. 1-15.

Fourth Day—"Whoso . . . seeth his brother have need."—1 John iii. 1-24.

Fifth Day—"A good man sheweth favor."—Ps. cxli. 1-10.

Sixth Day—"I was an hungered and ye gave me meat."—Matt. xxv. 31-40.

PRAYER MEETING TOPIC, SEPT. 5.—OUR GIFTS FROM GOD; OUR GIFTS TO GOD.—Rom. viii. 26-39.

OUR GIFTS FROM GOD.

God is the giver of all good things, does He not provide for all the birds, and beasts, and fishes? Do not the sparrows fly from their bush and every morning find meat where they laid it not? Do not the young ravens call to God, and He feeds them? And were it reasonable that the sons of the family should fear the father would give meat to the chickens and the servants, his sheep, and his dogs, but give none to them? He were a very ill father that should do so; or he were a very foolish son that should think so of a good father. But, beside the reasonableness of this faith and this hope, we have infinite experience of it; how innocent, how careless, how secure is infancy, and yet how certainly provided for! We have lived at God's charges all our life, and have (as the Italian proverb says) sat down to meat at the sound of a bell; and hitherto He hath not failed us; we have no reason to suspect Him for the future.

GIFTS.

Our gifts to God must be given every day, since His gifts to us come every day.

"We give him but his own," whatever we give; and the loving acknowledgment that it is His own is one of the best gifts of all.

There is but one riches, and that is the wealth that come from giving.