



LESSON X.—JUNE 8, 1902.

The Council at Jerusalem.

Acts xv., 22-23. Commit to memory vs. 30-32. Read Acts xv.

Golden Text.

‘Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.’—Gal. v., 1.

Home Readings.

Monday, June 2.—Acts xv., 1-11.
 Tuesday, June 3.—Acts xv., 12-21.
 Wednesday, June 4.—Acts xv., 22-23
 Thursday, June 5.—Gal. ii., 1-10.
 Friday, June 6.—Gal. vi., 7-18.
 Saturday, June 7.—Phil. iii., 1-11.
 Sunday, June 8.—Gal. v., 1-14.

Lesson Text.

(22) Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren; (23) And they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles and elders and brethren send greetings unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: (24) Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law; to whom we gave no such commandment; (25) It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, (26) Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. (28) For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; (29) That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. (30) So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle; (31) Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation. (32) And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. (33) And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.

Suggestions.

When Paul and Barnabas had retraced their steps from Derbe, which was the last point visited, to Lystra and thence to Iconium and Antioch of Pisidia, comforting and exhorting their converts, and selecting suitable persons to be church officers, they made their way back, by Perga and Attalia, to Antioch of Syria. Here they reported to the church all the results of their journey, at a great missionary meeting. How much interested that congregation must have been who had sent them out with so much prayer! (Acts xiii., 2, 3; xiv., 26.) And the most interesting part was that though they had gone out to preach primarily to those of their own nationality, they had found the heathen more ready to listen, and so, as servants of God, had opened the door of faith to the heathen. (Acts xvi., 27.) It seems that Paul and Barnabas did not think it necessary at this time to give their report to the Jerusalem church as well. The Antioch church was an independent centre of missionary effort. Besides this foreign mission for which it may have given funds, it was trying to evangelize the country round about. So Paul and Barnabas settled down after their arduous journey (which probably had occupied about a year), and helped with the home mission work in Syria. But

other teachers came to Syria, bigoted Jews who taught the converts from heathenism that, being Christians would not save them, they must become Jews as well. They must be circumcised and keep all the minute regulations about different kinds of meat, and about the Sabbath day, which were given in the law of Moses and in the commentaries of the Scribes. This foolish teaching made so much trouble that Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to get the apostles to give some authoritative declaration which would put a stop to it. After much disputing between different parties in the Jerusalem church Peter rose and reminded the assembly of the case of Cornelius, and with the impetuous warmth of the plain Galilean fisherman he spoke of the law of Moses as ‘a yoke which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.’ Then the people listened to the thrilling account which Paul and Barnabas gave of their missionary journey, after which James, himself a strict keeper of the law, referred to the prophecies that the heathen would sometime turn to God, and said that the church ought not to add to the difficulties of those who were turning to God now. The result of the conference was the letter given in to-day’s lesson. It seems to modern readers a strange sort of arrangement that they decided on with so much care. Why should they lay down three rules about meat and only one about morals for the converts from heathenism? We will understand this letter if we consider the circumstances. The Jews were so particular about food (some of them are so to this day) that they would not be friendly with people who eat meat not killed in the Jewish or ‘Kosher’ way. In order for the Jewish and Gentile Christians to be at peace, it was doubtless right for the latter to conform for a time to Jewish ways. As for moral laws, all the educated heathen knew that it was wrong to steal and to murder, but they had not a high standard of purity, and had to be taught what God requires in this respect. Many a heathen in our own day is willing to do right in every other respect, but thinks he must have several wives. It was something the same with the heathen of St. Paul’s time. But those who turn to Christ must turn to purity of life and heart.

C. E. Topic.

Sun., June 8.—Topic—How the weak become strong. II. Cor. xii., 9, 10; Isa. xli., 10; lviii., 11.

Junior C. E. Topic.**MISSIONARY SUFFERINGS.**

Mon., June 2.—What Stephen suffered. Acts vii., 57-60.

Tues., June 3.—What James suffered. Acts xii., 1, 2.

Wed., June 4.—What Peter suffered. Acts xii., 3-6.

Thu., June 5.—What Paul suffered. II. Cor. xi., 23-28.

Fri., June 6.—What Christ suffered. Mark xv., 34.

Sat., June 7.—‘Our great tribulation.’ Rev. vii., 14.

Sun., June 8.—Topic—What missionary converts have to suffer. II. Tim. ii., 3.

**The Logic of Conscience**

(By Rev. J. P. Gledstone, in ‘The Christian.’)

Conscience has a method of reasoning quite as clear and conclusive as that of the intellect; once grant the postulates, and you are driven, or drawn, to the inevitable conclusion. We may call the process mental, but it is prompted, guided, and ended by the force of conscience, which will give no peace, save as it is obeyed step by step. Admit the great Christian truths that God loves all men, that he gave his Son to be the propitiation for their sins, and that he is not willing that any should perish, and as sure as any demonstration in Euclid come the various steps by which men are emanci-

pated from every evil. The simple ethical commands of the gospel also all propel the conscience in the direction to which its great principles and facts point. If reformers only knew it, the old and familiar words of Scripture, by which the Christian mind is enlightened, contain the germs of all progress.

THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS AND SLAVERY.

I know of no instance in which the steady advance of conscience from point to point is so clearly seen as in the deliverance of the Society of Friends from all complicity with slavery in America. In the eighteenth century large numbers of slaves were owned by Friends, and when, in 1714, a feeling of uneasiness arose concerning it, a Yearly Meeting could not be persuaded to do more than give an expression of opinion adverse to the importation of Negroes from Africa; ‘yet this was only caution, and not censure.’ In 1727 the practice was censured, though it was still continued by some. In 1758 it was prohibited. Then came the inevitable question of dealing in slaves, and of holding slaves at all, and the Christian conscience declared against both, and prompted a measure of manumission, accompanied by a sufficient provision for those set free. Conscience, moved by tenderness towards both slaves and slave-owners, kept pressing its demands, and in 1776 ‘the subordinate meetings were directed to deny the right of membership to such as persisted in holding their fellow men as property.’ Some Friends were disowned for not complying with this advice. The next requirement of this inexorable Christian conscience was that compensation should be given—not to the masters—but to the freed slaves by their former masters for their past services! Any former slaveholder who refused to comply with the award of committees appointed to fix the amount of compensation, should, ‘after due care and labor with him, be disowned from the Society.’ ‘This was effectual; settlements without disownment were made to the satisfaction of all parties, and every case was disposed of previous to the year 1787.’ Conscience finally brought this Christian society to the only logical, safe, and abiding conclusion; and after that event the members became consistent and powerful apostles of emancipation, and, as was sure to be the case, were listened to with respect. When allowed to speak and act, conscience will never rest short of absolute consistency.

THE DRINK QUESTION.

For two generations the consciences of a large number of English Christians have been troubled about the drunkenness of the English nation, but, hitherto, no advance has been made beyond the position of persuading individuals to become abstainers, and securing some improvements in the licensing laws. But this falls far short of what conscience will require and ultimately obtain. The connection between the Church of Christ, which should be without spot and blameless, and the drink traffic, which is saturated with moral pollution, is becoming intolerable. It is a scandal to Christianity that a system so destructive of everything good, so gigantic, so dangerous to the State, so opposed to the extension of the Kingdom of God in the earth, should have been allowed to grow up to its present dimensions, and should be tolerated from year to year. It gives even the enemy cause to blaspheme, for he can see that if Christianity were properly applied to life, if only to the life of the Church, this monstrosity would ultimately be removed. It cannot be reconciled with the spirit and precepts of the Gospel. Though no express command has been spoken against drinking intoxicating liquors, yet their use as a beverage by men who profess to love their fellows wounds the conscience and raises a protest.

WHERE SHALL THE CHURCH BEGIN?

If among her own members the Church is to accomplish any reform, where is she to begin? Conscience points, in the first instance, to the trader, the man who manufactures, the man who sells, the man who makes gain, and says that he ought not to be allowed to hold office in the Church. It is revolting, or is becoming so, to the feeling of the Church, that anyone who bears the honored name of Christian should be promoting a trade which is ruining and destroying in perdition thousands upon thou-