

would have encumbered them in their work. **At a young man's feet.** He may have been about thirty-five years old when he took this active part in the persecution. **Whose name was Saul.** This was the first appearance upon the scene of one who, next to the Saviour, did more to establish the Gospel and save the world than any other man in history. He was born at Tarsus, brought up in the study of the law at Jerusalem, but was probably absent during the ministry and death of Jesus. There is some reason to suppose that he had known Barnabas before he became a disciple, and had other friends in the Church. But he was himself opposed to the new religion, and strove to stifle his own convictions by persecuting it. 4. See how Christ shows his power in transforming his bitterest enemy into his greatest apostle.

59. They stoned Stephen. Perhaps showing by the repetition of the verb that the stones were falling while the martyr was praying. **Calling upon God.** [Rev. Ver., "calling upon the Lord."] Stephen, while full of the divine Spirit, and privileged with a view of the unseen, addresses Jesus as God, and calls upon him as no saint or angel is addressed in Scripture. **Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.** He calls upon the Lord Jesus, as the dying Jesus had called upon his Father (Luke 23. 46.), showing that he regarded Jesus as God.

60. He kneeled down. Dying not as a malefactor but as a saint, in calmness, and as if unconscious of the scene around him. **Cried with a loud voice.** Which never ceased to echo in the ears of at least one who heard it. **Lay not this sin to their charge.** Literally, "Weigh not against them this sin." The dying saint follows the example of his dying Saviour in a prayer for his enemies (Luke 23. 34.), showing at once a knowledge of the events of Christ's death, and a recognition of himself as dying in some sense like his Master. 5. Even in death the thoughts of the saint are upon his Saviour. 6. He who has lived like Christ will have his spirit in death. **He fell asleep.** The usual Christian expression for dying; indicating that his end was peaceful even though stones were falling and angry voices were sounding around him.

1. Saul was consenting. Literally, "was taking pleasure in." Not a malignant, frenzied pleasure; but the satisfaction of one who felt that he was doing his duty, however unpleasant. **At that time.** [Rev. Ver.] "There arose on that day." The murder of Stephen was the beginning of a period of trial to the Church, for the thirst of the mob was but excited by the blood of the first martyr. **They were all scattered.** Not that every disciple was driven away, but the assemblies were broken up, some of the believers were scourged and imprisoned, and many more were driven out of the city. It is not known that any others besides Stephen were put to death. **Regions of Judea.** In the villages of the entire province, as the persecution was at first

only local to the metropolis. **And Samaria.** Now first mentioned in the history of the Christian Church. At first a refuge, it soon became the planting ground of a new Church. Already the traditional enmity between Jew and Samaritan was being overcome by the Gospel. **Except the apostles.** It is a suggestive fact that the twelve remained in the city. Perhaps it was in obedience to their Lord's command; perhaps because the persecution was directed mainly against those who were in sympathy with Stephen's advanced views concerning the Gospel for the Gentiles, which the apostles had not yet fully adopted.

2. Devout men. This is an expression used not of Christians, but of Jews who were faithful to their own religion. They thus showed their admiration for his character, their protest against his tumultuous and illegal murder, and the fact of a secret sympathy with the Gospel, toward which they stood as Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had stood toward Christ. **Carried Stephen,** etc. "Buried Stephen," [Rev. Ver.] Ordinarily one stoned to death was buried without honour, or left dead under a heap of stones. **Made great lamentation.** "A great beating," (literally), as the mourning was accompanied with beating on the breast; not a dignified Christian mourning, with an undertone of peace. 7. Christ's people sorrow not as do others, without hope.

3. Havoc of the Church. "Laid waste." [Rev. Ver.] An expression generally used of wild beasts or hostile armies ravaging and destroying. **Entering into every house.** Rather "from house to house," violating the sanctities of home, not content with breaking up the assemblies of believers. **Haling.** An old word, akin to "hauling;" meaning an arrest by judicial authority, but made with violence. **Women.** Thus, by his treatment of women, showing unusual vehemence and bitterness in his persecution. **Committed them to prison.** Some were scourged in the open synagogue; some were threatened with death, and some were induced to disown Christ. (See Acts 22. 4, 19; 26. 9-11, and other references.) Doubtless to many it seemed to forbode an end of the Church and the ruin of the Gospel, yet it was God's plan for its enlargement.

4. Therefore Because of this persecution, which was thus made to minister to the success of the truth. **Scattered abroad.** Though scattered they still clung to their faith and their testimony. **Went everywhere.** As yet in Palestine and Syria only. **Preaching.** Not in set sermons, but in every form of utterance. **The word.** A term, doubtless in constant use in the early Church, meaning "the word of the Gospel of Christ." 8. All that enemies can do is to extend the sphere of the Gospel. 9. See how God makes even his enemies do his work!

GOLDEN TEXT.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. Rev. 2. 10.