

not a momentary impulse, but that it met with his full approval. Saul's spirit would be that of Psalm 139: 19-22. Stephen was in his eyes an enemy of God's law and of His holy place.

## IV. What Followed His Death, ch. 8: 1, 2.

V. 1. *There arose on that day* (Rev. Ver.). The Jews were now awakened, through the work of Stephen, to the significance of this movement of the Nazarenes, and their murder of their leader Stephen was the signal for an outbreak of hatred against his brethren. *The church which was at Jerusalem.* There were other churches in Judaea. *They were all scattered abroad.* Thus the persecution was the means of spreading the gospel. The persecutors thought to beat the fire out, but they only scattered sparks that soon lit new conflagrations throughout Palestine.

*Except the apostles.* We cannot say why they remained and how they escaped death.

V. 2. *Devout men.* This word probably denotes that others besides Christians buried Stephen. Probably it means men pious in devout observance of the law and worship in the temple. So it might be used of either Jews or Jewish Christians. If Luke had meant only Christians, he would probably have said either "disciples" or "brethren." *Great lamentation;* with beating of the breast. This public expression of sorrow would come from the moderate class of the Pharisees, men like Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, or Jewish proselytes, of whom Cornelius (Acts 10) may be taken as a type. There were probably a large number of sympathizers with the Christians, who lived in retirement as good Jews. These would mourn for such a man as Stephen.

## APPLICATION

By Rev. J. M. Duncan, B.D., Associate Editor

*They were cut to the heart and they gnashed on him with their teeth,* v. 54. "Only that which is replaced is destroyed," says one of the characters in a widely-read novel. These men were vainly striving to huddle out of sight and memory their cruel murder of the Holy One of God. But, as the murderer in the legend saw the blood oozing up through the floor to keep the tell-tale stain fresh in spite of all his efforts to wash it out, so they could not hide their awful sin. It tracked them down into their most secret places. They could silence preachers like Stephen but they could not stifle conscience. They could rid themselves of guilt only by replacing it with penitence. Repentance would have enabled them, not to forget their sin, but to look back on it without fear. Their anger robbed them of the peace they might have had. Do not be angry when conscience or a faithful friend rebukes you. Put away the evil thing and put in its place humble trust in Christ and you will find true peace.

*But he . . . looked up steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God,* v. 55. A sense of the presence of God is the secret of moral courage which is the highest kind of courage. It was Joseph's recognition of God's near-

ness that made him a hero. He was not afraid to tell of his brothers' misdeeds in spite of their threatenings, he found no difficulty in resisting his great temptation, he felt no trembling when he appeared before Pharaoh because he always realized that God was with him. The calmness of Elisha in Dothan, with the Syrian hosts encircling the city, the boldness of Daniel at the court of Darius, the self-possession of Paul during the shipwreck can all be traced back to the same source. The general who has strong reserves to bring up at the critical moment in the battle wins the victory. The man of faith always has God in reserve and so is not dismayed by any emergency.

*Behold I see the heavens opened,* v. 56. The heavens are always opened to the believing soul. The man of faith realizes that heaven is his true home—his fatherland. Plato taught that the soul comes into this world from a previous state of existence, and that it brings with it some memories of its former abode. The great pagan had caught some glimmerings of the truth that heaven is the true home of the soul.

*They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears,* v. 57. We have no right to question the reality of a spiritual experience re-