

beyond the limitations of our own minds, I should use no exaggeration.—B. F. WESTCOTT.

HERE is an instance of faith, like a grain of mustard seed, which can remove mountains, or wing its way over them.—JOHN KER.

IN the teaching of our Lord we find no attempt at a definition of faith. He used the word in a simple, popular sense, rooted in Old Testament usage, and took for granted that the religious instincts of his hearers would help them to understand sufficiently what He meant. But the import of the term as it occurs in the Gospels might be expressed by the single word "receptivity." An open mind receiving the announcements of the kingdom as at once *true* tidings and *good* tidings, credible and worthy of all acceptance, such was faith in the dialect of Jesus.—A. B. BRUCE.

NOTHING seemed to surprise the Son of God so much as the exercise of faith. We cannot define faith in any adequate terms: it is not a dictionary word. Faith is in the sixth sense, faith is the religious faculty, faith is the power that takes all other senses and glorifies them, faith is the step into the invisible which the soul takes in its supreme moments of inspiration.—JOSEPH PARKER.

WHEN St. Peter in the direst extremity cried aloud, "Lord, save *me!*" he was thinking only of his own life; and the Lord's answer was, "O thou of *little* faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" But when the Syro-Phoenician woman had lost herself in the safety of her child, and against all temptation to distrust, and even to hopelessness, had not

yet despaired of the love and power of the Son of Man, He read the depths of that riven heart, and said, "O woman, *great* is thy faith."—H. R. REYNOLDS.

By her belief in Him she had crossed the line and become spiritually one of His people, then the impossibility was removed, and we may even say, I think, that He could not help helping her.—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

ALL through the record of mercies and the miracles of Jesus there runs a certain subtle tone which puzzles us. I seem to hear, as I read, the sound of a great sea of might and mercy shut in behind necessities which it cannot disobey; I seem to hear it clamouring to escape and give itself away along long stretches of the wall which shuts it in; and then I seem to see it bursting forth rejoicingly where some great gate is flung wide open, and it may go forth unhindered to its work of blessing. So seems to me the story of the power and love of Jesus held fast under the conditions of the faith of men.—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

CHRIST saves all whom He can save, all who are savable. Doing all that He can first to make men willing to receive Him, He then at last is in the power of their willingness. "To as many as received Him gave He power to become the sons of God."—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

IN some village of England there is heard the cry of a suffering infant, the story of some wrong done to a little child comes to men's pitying ears, and all the village is stirred and will not rest until the wrong be righted, and the little child relieved. That little child with its woes is the master of those strong and brawny men.—PHILLIPS BROOKS.

The International Lessons.

I.

Acts xii. 1-17.

PETER DELIVERED FROM PRISON.

1. "James the brother of John" (ver. 2). James and John the sons of Zebedee. The other James, who is named in ver. 17, is, most probably, the brother of our Lord, not one of the Twelve.

2. "Four quaternions of soldiers" (ver. 4). A quaternion was a squad of four men. And here two were chained to Peter in the cell, the third watched outside the cell door (he is called "the first ward"), and the fourth guarded the outside door of the prison ("the second ward").

3. "Easter" (ver. 4); that is, the Passover.

"THE angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them." That is the Golden Text. It was written many centuries before this story of St. Peter's deliverance from

the prison, but there never was text and sermon that went better together. Would not the preacher, if he had this text to deal with, divide it into three divisions, thus—

I. They that fear the Lord are sometimes cast into prison;

II. But the angel of the Lord is encamped round about the prison;

III. And when the right time comes, He delivers them.

And then would not each of these divisions be beautifully and completely illustrated in the story of Peter's imprisonment and deliverance?

And, moreover, if each of these divisions were duly "enlarged upon," it might be possible to answer all the questions which rush through the busy brain of the young listener. *Why* are they that fear the Lord sometimes cast into prison? That is one of the very earliest questions, and

theology, which is very old to-day, has not yet quite found the answer for it. But some working answer is possible. For God does not *compel* people to be good, but leaves them free to choose; and as some people *will* be bad, they will always be doing bad things like this. And then, besides, they that fear the Lord are often the better for being cast into prison for a little, since otherwise they might forget that goodness and mercy follow them all the days of their life.

And then another very puzzling question which should be answered is, Why is the angel often so long in delivering, and why does He sometimes not deliver at all? The answer is simpler here. It is because the right time has not come. So it is not true that He sometimes does not deliver at all. Only the right time for deliverance may, in some cases, be after the whole occurrence has passed out of our sight. St. Peter was delivered from the prison on this occasion very soon, and, you might say, in the sight of everybody. But when he came to the house of Mary they thought it was his spirit. For it often happens that it is the spirit that is delivered, and the body that is left. The day came when they seized St. Peter again, and no angel was seen to lead him out of the prison, but the grim soldiers led him to the block there, and he died. Yet he was delivered. Can we not understand that he had a more glorious deliverance then? Lazarus the beggar had a more glorious deliverance in Abraham's bosom than Lazarus the brother of Martha when he came forth out of the cave.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Ver. 2. There is a tradition which may be separated from all the idle legends which gather round the death of James; and this story relates how the prosecutor, in the trial which led to the death of the apostle, was so moved by witnessing his bold confession, that he declared himself a Christian on the spot. Accused and accuser were therefore hurried off together, and on the road the latter begged St. James to grant him forgiveness. The apostle, kissing him, said: "Peace be to thee, and pardon of all thy sins," and then they were beheaded together.

Ver. 5. A message was sent to Luther that Melancthon was dying. He found him presenting the usual premonitory symptoms of death. Melancthon, roused, looked in the face of Luther, and said: "O Luther! is this you? Why don't you let me depart in peace?" "We can't spare you yet, Philip," was the reply. And, turning round, he threw himself upon his knees, and wrestled with God for his recovery for upwards of an hour. He went from his knees to the bed, and took his friend by the hand. Again he said: "Dear Luther, why don't you let me depart in peace?" "No, no, Philip; we cannot spare you yet," was the reply. He then ordered some soup, and, when pressed to take it, Melancthon declined, again saying: "Dear Luther, why will you not let me go home and be at rest?" "We cannot spare you yet, Philip," was the reply. He then added: "Philip, take this soup, or I will excommunicate you." He

took the soup, soon regained his wonted health, and laboured for years afterwards in the cause of the Reformation; and when Luther returned home, he said to his wife with joy, "God gave me my brother Melancthon back in direct answer to prayer."

Ver. 13. Why did Rhoda go to *hearken*? You must remember that it was in the time of persecution. If they had opened the door at once, a party of Herod's soldiers might have rushed in and carried them all off to prison. I have seen myself, in Holland, houses where God's servants used to meet when the Church was persecuted by heretics, with little sliding panels in odd, out-of-the-way corners, so that if any one knocked at the door, people might look out and see who it was without its being known that any one was looking out. I daresay there was some such contrivance here. At all events, Rhoda went to ask who was there, and to have an answer too before she opened the door. And what does this prove? Why, that Rhoda was trustworthy. You cannot have a higher character than that.—J. M. NEALE.

II.

Acts xiii. 1-13.

THE FIRST CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES.

1. "They had also John to their minister" (ver. 5). John, who is better known by his second name of Mark, has already been mentioned. It was to his mother Mary's house that St. Peter went when he was delivered from the prison. He went now as minister or attendant on Barnabas and Paul. But we cannot tell what his work was, nor why he left them so soon. Some think he baptized, and some think he left because he was afraid to go farther. We know that afterwards he was a faithful minister of Christ. And it is almost certain that he was the evangelist who wrote the second Gospel.

2. "The deputy of the country" (ver. 7). St. Luke's word, translated here "deputy," is "proconsul," and it is one of the proofs of his accuracy, for that was the correct title for the governor of Cyprus at this time. A little before this he was called "proprætor."

THE persons who command our attention in this lesson are Paul and Barnabas. But there is a greater Presence than they, and we shall miss the meaning of the lesson unless we consider Him first of all.

Three times "the Holy Ghost" is introduced. Or rather, He is not introduced at all, but three times spoken of as the most abiding Presence there. And each time there is a decision and a precision in the mention of Him that is full of meaning. "As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said;" "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost;" "Then Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost." First He is the Speaker, next He is the Doer, and then He is the Inspirer.

And yet He was not heard, seen, or felt then, so far as we can judge, more than He is to-day. Is

it merely St. Luke's pious way of telling his story then? So children often think, and sometimes the thought is suggested to them by their elders,—that all religion is a matter of how you look at things; not knowing that the presence of the Spirit is more real and His commands more urgent on the Christian than the things he sees and handles.

Paul and Barnabas were *sent* forth. It is possible to go without being sent. Some have done so. And they may have done so from very unworthy motives, or they may have done so out of mere ignorance of the way. How, then, is one to know that he has been sent? The text is simple. The Spirit will go with us. He never sends us out alone. What does it say here? "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed;" but immediately after we have it, "Then Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost." So the Holy Ghost went with those whom He Himself sent forth.

And it was natural, almost inevitable, that their first conflict should be with a "child of the devil." When a man is not sent, the devil does not trouble to meet him in the way. That man carries his own temptation and fall in his own bosom, and the devil does not overthrow vanquished antagonists. So it is not to be expected that because we have been sent, we shall find the way pleasant. It is more likely to be just the other way; and a hot encounter with the devil of doubt within or temptation without is a good certificate that we are indeed ambassadors of the King. The "child" whom the devil sent first to encounter Paul and Barnabas was Barjesus; he may send our own brother or friend as our first and most testing antagonist.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Ver. 2. Once the excellent teacher of a senior female class, after many years' faithful service, was called to her rest. Who should take her place? Superintendent and teachers united in saying, "We must have Miss W." It was so plain that she was the right person, that the call seemed like the voice of the Holy Spirit, saying, "Separate me Miss W. for this work." Well, she was invited; and, after much thought and prayer, said she was willing to try; but first she would like to talk with the class she had already. So next Sunday she told her scholars she was likely to leave them; that she hoped to do more good in the larger class, though she knew she could never love her new pupils more than her old ones; and that she was sure her successor would soon make them love her, and, with God's blessing, be very useful to them. On hearing this, all the class cried out: "We cannot let our teacher go." But she spoke wisely with them and lovingly; showed them it was God's will that they should part; hoped that some of them might soon, and all eventually, be themselves fit for the senior class, where they would have her again as their teacher. Thus she went on, until the sobs were hushed, and even the sunshine of a smile on two or three young faces broke through the tears of that good-bye. But in the class there was one girl who whispered to another: "If our teacher

leaves us, I leave too." "So do I," replied her companion; and from that day these two never entered the school again, although Miss W. and several of their companions entreated them to return. The last time their old teacher saw them, she said, and her words, I think, were most true: "You call your conduct love for me; I fear it is rather selfishness and pride." It is sometimes a hard lesson to give up all for Christ; and hardest of all to give up dear teachers and pastors, that they may do to others the good they have done to us.—S. G. GREEN.

VER. 5. "They preached the word of God." Those Christians have done most service who have in every instance trusted the Word for the power of the truth in it. Dr. James W. Alexander put in one of his letters, near the end of his career, the statement that, if he were to live his public life over again, he would dwell more upon the familiar parts and passages of the Bible, like the story of the ark, the draught of fishes, or the parable of the prodigal son. That is, he would preach more of the Word of God in its pure, clear utterances of truth for souls. When the saintly Dr. Cutler of Brooklyn died, the Sunday school remembered that he used to come in every now and then during the years of his history, and repeat just a single verse from the superintendent's desk; and the next Lord's Day after the funeral, they marched up in front of it in a long line, and each scholar quoted any of the texts that he could recollect. The grown people positively sat there and wept, as they saw how much there was of the Bible in the hearts of their children, which this one pastor had planted. Yet he was a very timid and old-fashioned man; he said he had no gift at talking to children; he could only repeat God's Word. Is there anybody now who is ready to say that was not enough for some good?—C. S. ROBINSON.

Ver. 11. An old Hindu story says, that Ammi one day called his son to him and said: "My son, bring me a fruit of that tree and break it open. What is there?" The son replied: "Some small seeds." "Break one of them, and what do you see?" said the father. "Nothing, my lord," said the son. "My child," said Ammi, "where you see nothing, there dwells a mighty tree." So it is in our experience; at times we allow Satan to cast over our eyes a film darkening the preciousness of God's word, and while we may fail to see the exquisite beauty therein, it contains a mighty truth whose end is eternal life.

III.

Acts xiii. 26-43.

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY SERMON.

1. "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (ver. 33). The apostle applies this passage not to the eternal Sonship of Christ, nor to His entrance into the world, but to His appearance again from the dead.

2. The next two quotations must be taken together to be understood. The word translated "mercies" ("I will give thee the sure mercies of David") in ver. 34 is the same in the original as that translated "Holy" ("Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption") in ver. 35. The "sure mercies," then, is the "Holy One," and the promise regarding the Holy One is that He should not see corruption.

THIS is St. Paul's "first missionary sermon." When we hear the words we think of a crowd of unclad savages gathered round a white-faced foreigner, whose language they cannot understand, and whose gestures they sometimes mistake for threatening and sometimes for fear. But such is not our missionary nor our audience. It is true that this Antioch in Pisidia is a long distance from the apostle's native land; but the people are his own countrymen mostly, he addresses them in their own Hebrew synagogue, sitting according to their Hebrew custom, and he speaks a language which is familiar to them all, though it is not Hebrew but Greek.

We must remember this, else we shall not understand the sermon. The apostle knows that his hearers are familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures, and he begins with them. In a few sentences he recalls the leading incidents in the history of the Old Testament till he reaches the time of David. He then reminds them of God's promise to David, that of his seed He would raise up a Saviour to Israel. That Saviour, he then says, is Jesus.

But there is a great difficulty. He has to tell them that Jesus was put to a shameful death. Is it possible that One who was crucified can be the Saviour promised to David? The apostle's answer is ready. He repeats some of the prophecies which spoke of His suffering and death. It is true, he says, that our rulers put Him to death, but they only fulfilled the prophecies in so doing, though they never knew it.

Then comes the strong link in his argument. He died, but He did not remain subject to death. He was declared to be the Saviour and the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead. Here was a proof independent of the prophecies. But there is prophecy of this also. And he then repeats and explains the promise to David: "Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

And when he has thus made the truth clear by convincing argument, that Jesus is the promised Saviour, he immediately presses home the application of it. He is a Saviour for you, a Saviour from your sins, the only Saviour and the sufficient.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—Ver. 26. A minister having to preach in the city gaol, was accompanied by a young man of fine mind and cultivated manners, but who was not a Christian. As the minister looked at the audience, he preached to them Jesus with so much earnestness as deeply to impress his companion. On their return home, the young man said: "The men to whom you preached to-day must have been moved by the utterance of such truth. Such preaching cannot fail to influence." "My dear young friend," answered the minister, "were you influenced? Were you impelled by the words you heard to-day to choose God as your portion?" "You were not preaching to me, but to your convicts," was quickly answered. "You mistake. I was

preaching to you as much as to them. You need the same Saviour as they. For all there is but one way of salvation. Just as much for you as for these poor prisoners was the message of this afternoon. Will you heed it?" The word so faithfully spoken was blessed of God.

Ver. 38. It is recorded of the Emperor Constantine that in his latter days, when nominally a Christian but unbaptized, he was oppressed by the memory of a great crime—the murder of his son. In his remorse his thoughts turned back to the religion he professed to have renounced. He applied to the Flamens at Rome for purification, and their answer was: "Our religion knows of no expiation for such a crime." He turned to the philosophers and received the same reply: "There is no pardon, no hope." Then some one reminded him that in that very region where heathen religion and heathen philosophy had failed, the triumphs of Christ had been won: "In Christianity there is forgiveness for every sin. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." And the royal murderer bowed his head in the presence of such infinite love, and he received the washing of regeneration and became the first Christian Emperor.—AUBREY L. MOORE.

Ver. 39. During a religious awakening in a manufacturing village in New England, a foreman was awakened, but he could not find peace. His superior sent him a letter, requesting him to call at six o'clock. Punctually at the hour specified he came. "I see you believe me," said his master. The foreman assented. "Well, see, here is another letter, which One still more in earnest, and far more to be trusted, sends for you," said the master, handing him a slip of paper on which were written a few texts of Scripture. The man took the paper and began to read slowly, "Come—unto—Me—all—ye—that—labour," etc. His lips quivered, his eyes filled with tears, and he joyfully exclaimed: "I see it! I see it! I am to believe that in the same way that I believed your letter."

IV.

Acts xiii. 44—xiv. 1—7.

APOSTLES TURNING TO THE GENTILES.

1. "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (ver. 48). In the previous verse it is said the Jews "judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life." Here it is said as many of the Gentiles "as were ordained to eternal life believed." In the one case the matter is looked at from the human side, in the other case from the divine. To be complete, theologically, each should be stated from both sides.

2. "Coasts" (ver. 50) is here used in the old English sense for borders generally. It is now restricted to the sea coast.

Two great discoveries were made by St. Paul. Or rather, two great revelations were made to him. The one was that there is a gospel, the other that the gospel is for Gentiles as well as Jews. We have seen the effect of the first revelation. We have now to see how the latter became the absorbing topic of his life and writings.

He was driven to it. St. Paul was a Jew, and he never forgot that the Jew had "much advantage every way." He knew that the command was: Begin at Jerusalem. "It was necessary," he says here, "that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you." He knew that the Gentiles were also to hear the good news. But he did not count it his place to say when or how. And when he did leave the Jews and turn to the Gentiles, he was driven to it. The Jews "judged themselves unworthy of everlasting life," and drove him to the Gentiles.

Notice these words. They judged themselves unworthy. Their objection to his preaching was that he was reducing them to a level with the uncircumcised Gentile. It was because they were so high-born and worthy that they refused to listen to him. No, says the apostle. This everlasting life is a thing above you, something to be attained to, even by you. If you accept it not, it is because you are unworthy; and you are yourselves the judges of your unworthiness.

So he did not make less of the gospel, because it stirred the opposition of the wealthy people of Antioch. It is said that at one time the Roman emperors were willing to give the statue of Jesus a place among their other gods in the temples. But the Christians declined the intended honour. And the time came when the Roman emperors discovered that Jesus was either no God at all, or else the God who says, "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." There was no middle position of mere easy toleration possible.

ILLUSTRATIONS.—xiii. 52. To be "filled with the Holy Ghost" is to have the kingdom of God in our heart. The love of God is the foundation of that kingdom, the will of God is the rule, and the glory of God is the end. "Filled with the Holy Ghost" is, then, to have God in us and with us, to live in the consciousness of the Divine presence, to cherish a calm and undoubting dependence upon the Divine strength. It is to submit our conduct to the guidance of

God, to keep our souls open to feel the impulses which come from God; and, when we feel them, to take no counsel with flesh and blood, but at once to yield obedience to the heavenly vision. It is to have a faith in God which shall possess our heart and soul with this one purpose—to do His will on earth ourselves, and then to get it done by others.—J. G. ROGERS.

xiv. 7. Christian Henry Ranch (a Moravian missionary) landed in New York in 1739. The Delaware and Mohican Indians, whom he first met, laughed at his desire to do them good; and the white men, who saw danger to their brandy trade, egged them on to violence. Ranch, however, persevered. He settled in an Indian village, Shekomeko. Once an Indian ran at him with an axe, and would have cut him down, but fell into the water instead. His faith and devotion triumphed. One of the leading Indians was converted, and his conversation led to others. The convert told his experience thus:—"Brothers, I was a heathen, grew up among the heathen, and know well how it is with them. One day a preacher came to us to instruct us; he began by proving to us that there is a God. 'Oh,' we replied, 'do you think we do not know this? Go home again.' Another time a preacher came to teach us not to steal, and drink, and lie, etc. We replied: 'You fool, do you think we do not know this? Go first to your own people, and teach them. For who does all these things worse than your own people?' So we sent him off. Sometime afterwards Christian Henry came; he sat down in my hut and said: 'I come to you in the name of Him who is Lord of heaven and earth; He tells you that He would save you and deliver you from your misery. Therefore He became man; gave His life and shed His blood for men.' Then he lay down on a bed in my hut, for he was worn out. I thought within myself, What sort of a man is this? I could slay him, and hide his body in the wood, and no one would care. But I could not get the words he had spoken about Christ shedding His blood for us out of my head. I dreamed of it by night. It was different from what we had ever heard of before. Then I told all this to others, and what Christian Henry had said besides. In this way the awakening began among us. Therefore I say: 'Brothers, preach Christ to the heathen. His blood, His death, if you would make anything of them.'"

At the Literary Table.

THE BOOKS OF THE MONTH.

DISSERTATIONS ON THE APOSTOLIC AGE. BY THE LATE J. B. LIGHTFOOT, D.D., D.C.L., LL.D. (*Macmillan*. 8vo, pp. 435. 14s.) It has often been felt, and the feeling has found expression in our own pages and elsewhere, that the essays with which the late Bishop of Durham enriched his Commentaries ought to be published separately. This has now been done. It has been

done with the same generosity in respect of paper and printing and binding as have made the Commentaries themselves the desired of even untheological book-buyers. The Essays are printed without alteration, and, except in one instance, without addition. That significant exception is the essay on the "Christian Ministry." To it have been appended—(1) A passage from the *Apostolic*