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Save for my daily range
Among the pleasant fields of Holy Writ,
I might despair. —Tennyson.

The International Sunday-School Lesson.

SECOND QUARTER. LESSON I, APRIL 6, 1902.

ACTS IX, 1-12

SAUL OF TARSUS CONVERTED.

Hebrew ecclesiasticism is tottering to its fall. Those who enjoy her easy-going benefices are in a rage against the plebeian power which bids fair to bury them with all their offices and emoluments under the derbis of disestabishment. The advent of Saul is hailed with delight. The Cilician enthusiast rushes to the resue. He is an ideal inquisitor. With the vigor of youth he unites the erudition and dialectical skill of a patriarch. The "heyday of his young manhood" supplies the physicial force, while completest knowledge of the history and dogma of Israel provides the mental furnishing. Saul departs for Damascus with the benedictions of those who get their living by priest-craft. Many sincere souls, who consider Christianity a dangerous innovation, also follow the persecutor with their prayers.

It is a journey extraordinary! The sailing of three little ships from Palos, fourteen hundred years later, was not so significant. The outcome of that voyage was the discovery of a hemisphere. The issue of the expedition to the capital of Syria affects two hemispheres to the end of time.

There is no more striking comment on the saying "Man proposes, but God disposes," than the ninth Chapter of Acts. The denouement is exactly opposite to the one expected. Fire of persecution is of a sudden quenched. Threats give place to prayers. He who expects to make others tremble does his own trembling. He who thinks he knows everything is to have an obscure disciple for a teacher. He who expects to lead others bound is glad to find someone to lead him.

Yet he reads this this thrilling incident superficially who imagines that the conversion of Saul is a mechanical affair—a case of sacred sunstroke. The appearance of Jesus is a merciful approach to a noble soul in desperate straits,—one whose heredity and environment are dead against the dawning conviction of the truth of the system he has set himself to destroy. In no other sense can the expression, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" be understood. Saul first felt the pricking point of conscience, as Augustine suggests, when he witnessed officially the death of Stephen. A religion that made a man's face shine like that of an angel, helped him to forgive and pray for his murderers, gave him a vision into the open heavens, and enabled him to die like one falling asleep, —such a religion has marks of Divinity. Yet, is not the religion of Moses Divine too? And where is it taught that it shall ever be abrogated? The very fury of Saul's persecution against the Christians is an effort to extricate himself from a dilemma—an effort which the Lord mercifully cuts short by the direct revelation of himself.

Such is the eagerness of this young Sanhedrist to lay his hands upon these peryerts from Jewry that he shows no pity toward either man or beast in his own cavalcade. The universal Eastern custom would have called a long halt during the noon hours. But on he speeds,

"With lips firm closed and fixed eye,
Like warrior when the fight is nigh,
Nor talk nor landscape heeds."

A half-mile, and the goal of this ever-memorable journey will be reached. The city's eastern gate is in sight. On an instant it is as if the troop struck an invisible but impenetrable barrier. Brave riders are unhorsed, and dumb brutes give sign of recognizing the preternaturalness of the event.

"What sudden blaze is round him poured,
As though all heaven's refulgent hoard
In one rich glory shown?"

No wonder that the highroad has been deflected from the spot where this scene is thought to have transpired, in order that careless feet may not profane it. A deep excavation has been made in the original roadbed by the carrying away of pebbles by myriads of pilgrims. The conversion of St. Paul is next to Pentecost in importance in the history of Christianity. Aside, too, from its sacred claims, on purely historic grounds, the spot is one of transcendent interest. There the complexion of Europe was changed, and our current Occidental civilization made possible.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

Grace, even in Paul's case, was not irresistible. When he says he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, the inference is plain that he might have been, if he had so chosen. Mighty motives are still brought to bear upon the erring—but that ultimate element of selfhood, the will, is never violated.

See the utility of prayer. If Saul had not prayed, Ananias had not come to him.

The obligation of baptism is apparent. Saul immediately submitted to and honored the rite.

The splendid courage of Saul is evident. As in a panorama, the scenes of his future sufferings passed before him; but none of them deterred him from espousing the cause of the divinity of which he was now convinced.

The infidel Lord Littleton set for himself the task of proving the conversion of Saul a fiction. It was the means of his own conversion; and his monograph upon the subject is a Christian classic. Barrett says, "Well, many a reflective mind, hitherto unmoved, has yielded to the power of this page of the gospel."

The insufficiency of conscience as a guide is exemplified in this incident—Saul "verily thought he ought," etc. there are consciences and consciences. One illuminated and cleansed is a reliable guide, and only such a one.

One sentence in that never-to-be-forgotten dialogue quite lifts the veil from the heart of the prostrate persecutor: "It is hard for thee too kick against the pricks." So, then, Saul has been resisting repeated thrusts of the goad of conscience. The very speed and fury of this long, inquisitorial journey may have been a last effort to rid himself of the conviction of the Messiahship of Jesus—a conviction which no doubt began at the martyrdom of Stephen.

LITERARY NOTES.

COSMOPOLITAN.

"What Women Like in Men." "What Men Like in Women," and "Husbands and Wives," are the titles of a series of very interesting papers by Rafford Pike, the third of which appears in the *Cosmopolitan* for April. The same number of the *Cosmopolitan* treats of Prince Henry's visit, with a series of beautifully printed photographs, under the title of "A Cleaver Emperer and a Confederation of Nations." F. Hopkinson Smith, Israel Zangwill, Bret Harte and Maartens-Maartens are among other contributors to this number, which is unusually good in fiction.

THE OUTLOOK.

In choice and printing of illustrations the monthly Magazine Numbers of *The Outlook* have greatly improved of late, and the April Magazine Number has pictorially both distinction and variety. The list of illustrated articles includes an elaborate presentation of the plans for beautifying Washington, by Mr. Elbert F. Baldwin, with a dozen beautiful pictures from the artists' original drawings and maps of "Washington Fifty Years Hence;" a thrilling account of experiences on the Antarctic Continent by Mr. Borchgrevink, the leader of the expedition of 1898, and the first man to set foot on the Antarctic Continent, with reproductions of many of the explorer's own photographs; portraits and brief sketches of the new Secretary of the Navy, Mr. Moody, Admiral Kempff, and the Rev. Stopford A. Brooke; a notable article on "Education in the Philippines," by the Hon. Fred W. Atkinson, Superintendent of Public Education in the Philipines, with photographs taken for the purpose; a further installment of Dr. Edward Everett Hale's "Memories of a hundred years;" and "The Lambert Masterpieces," an account of the remarkable art collection made by Mr. Lambert, a silk manufacturer of Patterson, New Jersey, with reproductions of paintings by Lawrence, Romney, Reynolds, Botticelli and other great artists. In this, as in all the magazine numbers, the current history of the world and progress of literature are recorded and interpreted as fully as in the unillustrated weekly issues.

REVIEW OF REVIEWS.

The *Review of Reviews* for April is, as usual, full of interesting material on various subjects. Beside "The Progress of the World," treating of the important topics of the month, there is an article on the Anglo Japanese Alliance from the Japanese point of view, a rapid review of our great "Captains of Industry," a description of the new Lying-In Hospital in New York, and a character sketch of the late Col. Francis Parker. Other articles are "Educating the Deaf-Blind," "A new Factor in Lake Shipping," "Can Rural Social Forces be Federated?—A First Step," and a sketch of the late Charles Lewis Tiffany, the New York Jeweler. The "Leading Articles of the month" Department gives a glimpse of much that is good in other magazines.

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