

The Christian Messenger.

BIBLE LESSONS FOR 1875.

INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

SUNDAY, July 25th, 1875.—The New Birth.—John iii. 7-17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"As many as received him, to them gave he power, to become the sons of God." John i. 12.

ANALYSIS.—I. The new birth illustrated. Vs. 7, 8. II. Surprise expressed Vs. 9. III. Answer to unbeliever. Vs. 10-13. IV. The cross foreshadowed. Vs. 14-15. V. Infinite love proclaimed. Vs. 16, 17.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.—After the miracle in Cana, Jesus remained in Galilee two or three months. But at the Passover, occurring in April, and but a few weeks after his baptism, he went up to Jerusalem, and there began his first Judean ministry. He cleansed the Temple of its desecration, spoke of the temple of his body, and wrought miracles; because of which many Jews believed on him, but with little sincerity. Nicodemus, however, a Pharisee a member of the Sanhedrim, the great Jewish Council of Seventy, could not silence his religious curiosity to know more of this Wonder-worker, and so, in a spirit of timidity, and yet of honesty, he visits Jesus by night. It was far better than no visit at all, for Jesus rewarded his visitor as he rewarded no other single human being—with a disclosure of truth that is worth more than all the wisdom of the world.

EXPOSITION.—Verse 3.—Jesus answered. The best explanation of the relation of Christ's answer to the words of Nicodemus (in verse 2) is, that while he only expresses his assurance that Jesus was a teacher from God, the real purpose of his visit was to learn what Jesus would say of the nature of Messiah's kingdom. Jesus, speaks to this inward thought, and thus gives to Nicodemus immediate and new evidence of his Divine mission. Verily, verily, I say unto thee. Emphatic, giving solemn weight to the words following. Except a man. Literally, "except any one." Be born again. The word translated "again," is always elsewhere used by John in its literal sense, "from above," and should be so translated here. "Born from above;" that is, from or of God, as John explicitly states elsewhere. See i. 13; i John ii. 29; iii. 9; iv. 7; v. 1. Paul calls the change a new birth, or regeneration (Titus iii. 5). The teaching here, and elsewhere, is that a change is to take place in man of which God is the author, and which does not simply bring out what was already in man, but rather originates that which before had no existence. Apart from grace all men are sinners, wholly destitute of true love to God. In Romans iii. viii. 1-15, is taught the doctrine of "total depravity." He cannot see the kingdom of God. "To see," is often used as an emphatic way of saying to have part in, or to experience.

Verse 4.—How can a man be born when he is old? etc. This shows that he is utterly perplexed by Christ's answer. Comp. i. 13. "Not of blood."

Verse 5.—Verily, verily, etc. Solemn asseveration, as in vs. 3. The repetition here fits the gravity of the doctrine. Of water and the spirit. In vs. 3, as elsewhere, the change is said to be from above, or from God; here, as in many other passages, Christ teaches that God, in the person of the Spirit, works the change. The word "water," some hold to be used merely as the symbol of purification; others as equivalent to baptism. The latter seems the more natural, as it gives more fullness and pendency of meaning, Titus iii. 5. Even if Nicodemus might not understand it in this fullness, he would in time do so. Besides, it was spoken for the instruction of all the generations. Faith in Christ is required in order to baptism, and such faith as is a fruit of the Spirit, and an evidence of regeneration. Acts. ii. 41.

Verse 6.—That which is born of the flesh is flesh. Flesh here, as often in Paul's writings, designates not simply human nature, but human nature as it is without the saving operation of the Spirit—fallen and depraved. See Romans viii. 1-15. Sometimes, as we saw in i. 14, it is used of human nature, viewed in contrast with the divine, and hence as frail, but not with the further idea of depravity again. That which is born of the Spirit [God] is spirit. Is God-like in its principle; that is, holy. This is meant when we are said to be "partakers of the divine nature."

Verse 7.—Marvel not, etc. Referring

to the exclamation of Nicodemus in vs. 4, "How can," etc. Ye, Thou, and all others. Born again. From above, or of God, as in vs. 3.

Verse 8.—The wind bloweth where it listeth [pleaseth]. The same Greek word means both wind and spirit. This seems to have led Christ to compare the Spirit's operation to the wind's movement, and to speak of the wind as willing, as though a personal agent. Christ is here speaking of the manner of the Spirit's action, as Nicodemus had said, "How." Thou hearest the sound thereof. The ear, but not the eyes sees it, and shows that it is, and moves. The eye sees its effects in the billows, the swaying trees, the flying leaves, the waving grass. The Holy Spirit also works changes such, and so great, as to show forth his existence and activity. Canst not tell whence, etc. The winds blow now this way, now that, inconstant, changing; yet are they governed by laws as fixed as those which hold the mountains in their places. So is every one that is born of the Spirit. So hidden from human sight and comprehension are the manner and reasons of the Holy Spirit's operation in the case of each regenerated person.

Verse 9.—How can these things be? It seemed incredible that such a change, wrought in such a way, could be the sole, indispensable condition of entrance into the expected kingdom.

Verse 10.—Art thou a master [teacher], etc. The Old Testament, though giving prominence to national and ritual laws, everywhere and abundantly insists that nothing but a right heart avails with God, and that all external obedience, without inward holiness, is abomination. Psalm li: Isaiah i, etc.; Jer. xxxi. 33.

Verse 11.—Verily, verily, etc. For the third time used by Jesus in this brief conversation. We speak. Jesus, of course, refers to himself principally, though he says "we." Perhaps he would join with himself those whom he authorized to speak for him. That we do know . . . that we have seen. We have only to recall our first lesson, which taught that the Word "was God," and "became flesh." Christ drew his knowledge of God from his own Divine consciousness, and did not gather it solely by study of Scripture, by inference, and argument.

Verse 12.—Earthly things. "Such as regeneration, the gate of entrance to the kingdom of God on earth." How shall ye believe? How can one read a language, if he has not learned the alphabet? Verse 13.—No man hath ascended, etc. The real point is, that no one save Christ has been in heaven with God. Earth-born men can be there only as they first ascend. Christ was eternally there as the Logos, and had his human life on earth only by a descent. Which [who] is in heaven. The original allows us to translate either "is," or "was," in heaven.

Verse 14.—As Moses lifted up the serpent. See Num. xxi. 4-9. Even so must the Son of man be lifted up. In his crucifixion, by which he made atonement for sin, and so became a Saviour of the lost.

Verse 16, 17.—God so loved the world. "The world" of sinful men. Comp. Rom. v. 8. Only those who believe are saved. Those who reject Christ are condemned because they reject. He would save them. They will not come unto him.

QUESTIONS.—Vs. 1. What is the symbol of the new birth? Is it right, then, to ever speak of baptism as a non-essential? What are fruits of the Spirit? Gal. v. 22, 23.

Vs. 8. Is it right to make our own experience the measure and rule of another's? Vs. 13. Where else are we taught Christ's heavenly origin? Phil. ii. 6, 7.

Vs. 14. Why was the serpent lifted up? Where besides this instance does Christ speak of the necessity of his sufferings? Mark viii. 31; Luke xxii. 37; John xviii. 11.

Vs. 15. What is meant by "perish"? What by "eternal life"? What is faith? Vs. 16. Do those to whom this Son of God is given increase their guilt by rejecting him? Luke xii. 47; Heb. x. 29? What is one of the first evidences of the new birth? Ans. Repentance.

Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, August 1st, 1857.—The Water of Life.—John iv. 4-15.

Here are some of the devious ways and wanderings of a love letter: A Boston lady, while in Paris two years ago, sent a letter to her sweetheart, a ship captain, addressing it to St. Helena. It missed the wanderer and followed him about the world, finally returning to Paris, where the captain's banker forwarded it to Boston. It reached him one evening as he was bawling a six-weeks-old baby on his knee, he having married the writer of the letter a year ago. That letter could not have followed him more persistently if it had been a dun.

Youths' Department.

A BIT OF A SERMON.

Whate'er you find to do, Do it boys, with all your might! Never be a little true, Or a little in the right; Trifles even Lead to heaven; Trifles make the life of man; So in all things, Great or small things, Be as thorough as you can.

Let not speak their surface dim, Spotted truth and honor bright! I'd not give a fig for him Who says any lie is white! He who alters, Twists or alters Little atoms when we speak, May deceive me; But believe me, To himself he is a sneak.

Help the weak, if you are strong; Love the old, if you are young; Own a fault, if you are wrong; If you're angry, hold your tongue; In each duty Lies a beauty, Just as surely, If your eyes you do not shut, And securely As a kernel in a nut!

Love with all your heart and soul; Love with eye and ear and touch; That's the moral of the whole; You can never love too much! 'Tis the glory Of the story In our babyhood begun; Our hearts without it, (Never doubt it), Are as worlds without a sun!

If you think a word would please, Say it, if it is but true; Words may give delight with ease, When no act is asked from you. Words may often Soothe and soften, Gild a joy or ease a pain; They are treasures Yielding pleasures It is wicked to retain!

Whate'er you find to do, Do it, then, with all your might; Let your prayers be strong and true; Prayer, my lads, will keep you right. Pray in all things, Great and small things, Like a Christian gentleman; And forever, Now and ever, Be as thorough as you can. —Good Words for the Young.

ATTENTIONS TO NEW COMERS.

"Lois" tells us, in the Sunday School Times, how to treat new comers—stranger little ones—in our schools. She says: Place the new-comer in your class beside the most genial, kindly member of it. By a quiet understanding between you let it be felt that you wish the stranger to be made to feel at home. Do not press him with burdensome attentions which will only make him feel more ill at ease, but let him glide quietly into place, in the regular order of the day's lesson. When school is over see if any one goes the stranger's way home, and if so let them walk together. It is a little thing, but does much toward making the child comfortable. It is very lonely and cheerless walking home alone from the strange Sunday school. This is particularly important in a city Sunday school. I shall never forget a dear little girl of six years old, my friend and I found crying piteously, on a street corner in New York, as we were returning from church one day. She had been to a Sabbath school in the vicinity, and could not find her way home. She was neatly dressed, and everything about her showed a loving mother's care. Two ragged street girls were talking with her as we came by, trying to persuade her to go with them. As the little one could not tell her address we took her home with us, and then, as best we could do, sent her to the station-house where her parents would be sure first to inquire for her. It was nine o'clock before she was restored to the well-nigh-distracted mother. We concluded she would not soon attend that Sabbath school again.

CATARRH.

Half the clergymen in New-England are afflicted with catarrh. I will give you a case, with its cure. The Rev. Mr. E. came to me, complaining of an absurd nose—there was aching, and running and snuffing and sneezing and other ridiculous conduct. This nose of his stuck itself into the midst of all his convenience and comfort and pleasure, and had been behaving just that way for fifteen years. Now what could he do? He had already

squirted all sorts of things into his nose, and taken gallons of sure cures.

I directed him to breathe through his nose, and I took a good smell of his breath, and found it was not ozena.

"Mr. E., you can cure yourself half in two weeks, and the whole in two months. The prescription is this: Go out every afternoon, about an hour or an hour and a half before dark, and walk six or eight miles. This must be in addition to the usual amount of walking. Then go without your supper, and retire as early as nine o'clock, or on special occasions not later than 10 o'clock."

"But what's that got to do with my nose? I don't walk on my nose!"

"You must take my prescription without any questions. I will give you five dollars for every mile you walk, if the prescription fails. It's enough for me to know what it has to do with the nose. Whether you know about its connection with the nose, I know not, nor do I care. Come again in two weeks and report."

In two weeks Mr. E. came again, to say that he was entirely well; which showed that I did not understand the length of time required to cure the malady. I rated him soundly for this irregularity, but assured him that he must go on to prevent its return.

Nine cases in ten of catarrh among the clergy of New-England, and I might say of the country (though this prescription is not so well adapted to the South), would be cured by this treatment. I have known it to be tried in a large number of cases. If anybody fails, let him report to me. But it won't fail unless it is a case of that horrible sort of catarrh known as ozena.—Dr. Dio Lewis, in The Congregationalist.

MOODY'S ILLUSTRATIONS.

An illustration need by Mr. Moody, to show that the law after it has created the consciousness of sin cannot cleanse the sinner, is pronounced by a writer in the English Independent very effective. He had promised his boy a ride in a carriage, but the little fellow, after having been suitably dressed, had soiled his clothes frightfully. "When Mr. Moody arrived," says the narrator, "he found his son not fit to be seen," and although the little fellow clapped his hands with delight in expectation of his ride, his father said, "Why, my boy, I can't take you in that state; you're so dirty!" "Oh, no, I'm not. Mama has washed me, and put on all my nice clean things, and you promised to take me!" Mr. Moody told us that he just hitched up his horse, took the little boy into the house, and held him up before a looking-glass. "That stopped his mouth," and he didn't say he was clean any more. "But," said the speaker, "I'll tell you what I didn't do—I didn't take the looking-glass to wash his face with!"

SAFE.

While speaking of the safety of salvation, Mr. Moody told the story of a young man who had gone on business in an American steamer. The steamer was wrecked. All hands, or nearly all, were supposed to have been lost. The name of this one amongst the rest was announced in the papers as being lost; but after a while a telegram came to the young wife, bearing the name and address of the husband, with a message of one word, "Safe." That telegram was now framed, and hung in the gentleman's office. So, as each lost sinner returns to Christ and finds salvation at the Cross, the message would go up to the home above, "Safe! Safe!" and there would be great joy there, and very much rejoicing. Safe in the mercy and love of Christ. It is everlasting mercy. It is almighty love. The security of salvation is a blessed truth full of comfort to the believer. "I will give unto them eternal life and they shall never perish."

A LITTLE GIRL'S LETTER.

The touching letter which follows is from a little girl to Mr. Moody: "Dear Mr. Moody—Would you be so kind as to pray at your next prayer-meeting for my dearest mamma, who is ill in London, that God may be pleased to make her better again? I love her so, and I have no papa, and I am only seven years old. Mamma is a dear Christian, and has taught me to love Jesus." ("Thank God for such a mother, and such a child," interposed Mr. Moody with faltering voice.) I like your hymns very much, and am learning the easy ones, for some seem made for little children like me. I am your little friend."

Mingled virtue and vice make a very uncertain twilight in the human soul.

CATCHIN' SOULS.

"Then there's just one thing more about this catchin' souls. 'Tis a most so good for ourselves as 'tis for those we try to save. There's nothing else, I believe, that'll make a man so watchful an' so careful about all he says an' does, as this will. When I used to go fishin' with a rod an' line an' caught sight of a big fish under the bank, why I could keep as still as a mouse for half a day. Other times we might run about on the bank, an' jump about as much as we liked. But now a shadow musn't fall 'pon the water; there musn't be a sound; only just letting the bait drop in, so gentle and quiet. Ah, you go an' try to catch a soul if you want to be watchful! No hasty words then; that would scare the soul away in a minute. No bit o' quick temper or angry ways, that would spoil it all. Pick out your soul, and begin to pray for it; set to work to catch it, an' we shall do it. Only set to work the right way. It isn't those who try, but those who try the right way—the wise—that shall shine as the stars. An' as for wisdom, for all it is the rarest thing in the world, bless the Lord we can get so much of it as ever we mind to, and all for nothing. 'If any of you;' never mind how dull a scholar he is, or how big a fool he is; 'if any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.' So let us all say as Simon did, an' mean it too, by the Lord's help, 'I go a-fishin'.'" —Rev. M. G. Pearce, in the City road Magazine, London.

Temperance.

THE POOR DRUNKARD.

O, I have sometimes looked at a bright, beautiful boy, and my flesh has crept within me at the thought that there was a bare possibility he might become a drunkard. I was once playing with a beautiful boy in the city of Norwich, Connecticut; I was carrying him to and fro on my back, both of us enjoying ourselves exceedingly; for I loved him, and I think he loved me. During our play I said to him, "Harry, will you go down with me to the side of the stone wall?" "O, yes!" was his cheerful reply. We went down together, and saw a man lying listlessly there, quite drunk, his face upturned to the bright blue sky; his beams that warmed and illumined us lay upon his porous greasy face; the pure morning wind kissed his parched lips and passed away poisoned; the very swine looking more noble than he, for they were fulfilling the purpose of their being. As I looked upon the poor degraded man and then looked upon that child, with his bright brow, his beautiful blue eyes, his rosy cheeks, his pearly teeth, and ruby lips—the perfect picture of life and peace—as I looked upon the man and then upon the child, and felt his little hand convulsively twitching in mine, and saw his little lips grow white, and his eyes dim, gazing upon the poor drunkard—then did I pray to God to give me an everlasting, incalculable capacity to hate with a burning hatred any instrumentality that could make such a thing of a being once as fair as that little child.—John B. Gough.

A MOTHER IN JAIL.

Sabbath evening we were sitting reading in our room, the bell rang, we answered and found two small boys, the elder not more than six years of age, the younger perhaps four. With a sad, pleading face the elder one looked up and said, "Please give me some bread; I am hungry; my father can not work, and he is taking care of the baby who is sick; my mother is in jail." "What," we asked, "is the matter that your mother is in jail?" "Oh, she was drunk." We asked, "How long has she been there?" "A week," he replied; "but she will be out next week." These boys were as bright and interesting children as one would see in any family. Verily the catalogue of crime and pauperism caused by strong drink is long; especially when we take into account the loss to society of the many children throughout our land,—children whose intellects are dwarfed through the vices of the parents, and who might be bright lights in their day and generation but for this blighting curse of strong drink. Who can look upon these wretched orphan children without vowing to do all he can to bring about the overthrow of that which causes this misery, sends the poor starving, shivering children, in the dead winter, to the streets, to beg a morsel of bread with which to satisfy their hunger and not only that, but to learn deeds of shame and infamy. Oh! when will men and women realize the enormity of this evil? Perhaps not until it is brought home to some of them by their dear sons falling before the tempter's snare.—Pittsburg Advance.