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Lost the Use of Her Limbs

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Said She Was Past All Help

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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Third Quarter-Lesson XI. — Sept. 9.

JESUS AND NICODEMUS.—John 3 : 1-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life.*—John 3 : 16.

THE SEEKER AFTER TRUTH.—Vs. 1, 2. *There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews.* An authorized religious teacher. Tradition reports him to have been a man of wealth and a rigid observer of the Pharisaic forms. *The same came to Jesus*, probably not long after the Passover. *By night.* The reason generally assumed is fear of the Jews, but this is not asserted by the Evangelist. As no bad motive is imputed to him, it is most in accordance with Christian charity to suppose that his motives were such as God would approve. The night might have been the only opportunity for such an interview. He would not commit himself as a follower of the unknown teacher till he was assured that he was really the Messiah. The evening hour, after the public work and teaching of Jesus was over, and the crowds had retired, was the best time. It is well to note that his going at all, implies strength of character, unprejudiced desire for the truth, earnestness, and honesty of purpose.

THE TEACHER SENT FROM GOD.—*Rabbi*, Master, teacher, a title applied to learned men and acknowledged teachers. *That thou art a teacher come from God.* So much they were assured of, but whether he was the Messiah or some inferior prophet they did not know. *For no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.* Miracles were God's signature endorsing those whom he had sent.

THE TRUTH TAUGHT; THE FIRST GREAT ESSENTIAL NEED OF HUMANITY, NEW LIFE FROM ABOVE.—Vs. 3-8. *Jesus answered....Except a man* (any one) *be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.* A new spiritual life is necessary. Christ's answer is equivalent to, "It is not learning, but life, that is wanted for Messiah's kingdom, and life must begin by birth." *The kingdom of God.* Not an outward kingdom, but that condition where God reigns as king, where he is the supreme object of love and service, where his will is the law. *Nicodemus saith.* The statement seems absurd to one who believes that he has long been a prominent member of the kingdom of God. *Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit.* Our Lord here speaks of the second birth as completed by two agencies, water and the Spirit. John baptized with water for the remission of sins, but he was always careful to disclaim power to baptize with the Holy Ghost His baptism "symbolized the washing away of sin from the soul. Those who humbly submitted to his baptism with confession of their sins went from it forgiven and cleansed. But more was needed, a new life in the soul implanted by the Holy Spirit. The declaration is that no man can enter the kingdom of God except by a public acknowledgment and confession of sin, a public putting off of the old man and entering into the new; and a real and vital change of life and character wrought by the Spirit of God in the heart of the believer. By the one act he enters into the visible and external kingdom; by the other, into the spiritual and invisible kingdom. *That which is born of the flesh is flesh.* Jesus now lays down the great principle of God's universe on which his doctrine of the new birth is based, and which proves its necessity. The law of nature is that only life can produce life, and therefore any object can rise into the kingdom above it only by means of new life imparted to it from that higher life, i. e., by being born from above. A stone cannot grow into a plant. The mineral kingdom cannot enter the vegetable kingdom except by plant life imparted to it. The vegetable kingdom cannot be changed into the animal kingdom except through the imparting to it of animal life. There is no power of development of one into the other. Each kingdom can produce only objects belonging to that kingdom. Whenever it is raised to a higher kingdom it is by importation from the kingdom above it. It cannot grow up to that higher kingdom of itself. So it is that *that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.* Spiritual life in us must come to us from God's spiritual life. God is always ready to bestow spiritual life. So this truth is not an excuse for refusing to enter the kingdom of God, but rather points out the way by which we may enter. *Marvel not.* For this truth is based on a common law. *Ye must be.* The emphasis is on ye, even the Jews. *Must be.* There is no escape from this law. *The wind bloweth.* The term for "wind" in Hebrew, as well as in Greek, was also the term for "spirit." *Where it listeth* (pleaseth) i. e., according to its own unknown laws. *Thou hearest the sound thereof*, etc. You see the results, but you cannot tell the causes which are beyond our reach. *So is every one that is born of the Spirit.* The Spirit's methods we cannot know, but the facts of the new life are as plain and certain as that the strong wind bends the forest trees. We may know the fact by the fruits.

THE AUTHORITY FOR THIS TRUTH.—Vs. 9-13. *How can these things be?* Nicodemus was astonished. *Art thou a master*, one distinguished for his learning. *And knowest not these things?* These words express surprise, and a hint of rebuke. *We speak that we do know*, etc. *We*, i. e., Jesus, and the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus, having made all things, knew all things, and spoke with absolute authority of perfect knowledge. *And ye receive not our witness.* Ye Jews. *If I have told you earthly things.* Those which can be seen and experienced on the earth, as the new birth and its fruits. *How shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things?* If you cannot trust my word in matters you can verify, how can you trust my testimony as to things you cannot verify by your own experience? *Heavenly things* are those truths which could not be learned without a revelation from heaven; divine forgiveness, the free, universal love of God, the divine nature of Christ, the atonement, the reality of life beyond the grave, the way to obtain it, the blessedness of heaven, the glories of the Messiah's kingdom on earth. *And no man hath ascended*, etc. No living person has gone to heaven, and seen what is there, and come back to report the facts. *But he that came down from heaven*, and thus knew all about it from personal observation and experience. This plainly implies the pre-existence of Jesus Christ. *Even the Son of man.* The "Son of man" is the true representative of humanity, not only God, but a real man. *Which is in heaven.* His home is in heaven, and he maintains continually a vital connection with heaven.

HOW THE NEW LIFE MAY BE OBTAINED.—Vs. 14, 15. *As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.* The reference here is to the event recorded in Num. 21 : 4 9. Great numbers were bitten by the fiery serpents in the wilderness, and many died. The bite was incurable. Moses was directed to make a brazen image of the serpents, and place it upon a pole, and carry it through the camp, so that all could see; and whosoever looked upon this brazen serpent was cured. The looking was an act of faith. *Even so must the Son of man be lifted up.* This refers to the exaltation of Jesus on the cross. *That whosoever believeth.* Believing is to accept with the heart the words of Jesus, so as to forsake sin and take him as our teacher and master. *Should not perish*, from sin, the natural effect of which is death. *But have eternal life.* The life which endures beyond the grave.

THE CENTRAL VERSE IN THE BIBLE.—V. 16. *For God so loved.* The emphasis is on the so. *So loved the world.* This sinful, wicked rebellious, world. *Gave his only begotten Son.* The only one who holds this peculiar relation; so that it was really a giving of himself for man. *That whosoever believeth.* The offer is unlimited. "Whosoever" includes us and every one.

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OUR MOTTO.—*If God be for us who can be against us.*

A Character Sketch of Miss Frances E. Willard.

BY W. T. STEAD.

The time had not come then. It came in the spring of 1876, when Miss Willard, the Secretary of the National W. C. T. U., was by herself alone one Sunday morning, preparing for a service, by Bible reading and prayer, in the town of Columbus, Ohio — an auspicious name:

"Upon my knees, alone in the room of my hostess, who was a veteran crusader, there was borne in upon my mind, as I believe from loftier regions, the declaration, "You are to speak for woman's ballot, as a weapon of protection to her home and tempted loved ones from the tyranny of drink," and then for the first and only time in my life there flashed through my brain in an instant a complete line of argument and illustration."

She was not disobedient to the summons. From 1876 forward she has never failed to deliver her message and to enforce its lesson. The new dogma was met, like all new truths, by determined opposition. The first president of the Union peremptorily forbade Miss Willard even to mention the subject at the convention. At Newark it was, in face of earnest, almost tearful, pleading of her friends, that she made her deliverance on the subject at a temperance convention. The chairman repudiated all responsibility, and told her at the close, 'You might have been a leader, but now you'll be only a scout." So blind and dull are even the best informed and best disposed when confronted with the new truth.

After this Miss Willard, hoping thereby to help the White Ribbon movement, took a spell as assistant with Moody, the evangelist, in Boston. She severed her connection with him on a question of principle. Moody objected to Miss Willard appearing on a temperance platform side by side with Unitarians. She dared not refuse the co operation of any who were willing to help because their shibboleths differed.

Miss Willard then began a systematic visitation of the whole American continent. Since 1878 she has addressed meetings in every town in the Union of 10,000 inhabitants, and in most of those with 5,000. In ten years, 1878-88, she averaged but three weeks a year at home, and she addressed an average of one meeting every day during the whole of that period. There is probably no other living person who can claim to have covered the States as she has done. She worked in the entire forty-four States and five Territories in one year, travelling with her friend, Miss Anna Gordon, thirty thousand miles by rail, river and stage. Nothing interfered with her propagandist zeal. Such energy could not fail to tell. Wherever Miss Willard went she coupled temperance reform and woman's suffrage and soon the opposition to the latter began to melt away even in the convention.

Of Miss Willard in her personal relations to her friends and relatives, to the men who have adored her, and the women who have loved her, I have unfortunately not left myself space to speak. In all her human relations, alike in the affairs of the heart and the affairs of the home, Miss Willard has been intensely womanly and therefore intensely human. She has got the idea of motherhood more deeply impressed on her brain than have most mothers, and she has also grasped the idea that, as women must have a larger place in the State, man must have a larger place in the home. "Motherhood will not be less, but fatherhood will be a hundredfold more magnified. To say this is to declare the approaching beautitude of men."

Miss Willard, it must be admitted even by her enemies, is intensely human. She is a child of nature as well as of grace. She is as broad in her religious beliefs as Dean Stanley, as fervent in her evangelicalism as Mr. Moody Naturally sceptical, she is a devout believer and an intensely interested inquirer into all manifestations of physical marvels which promise to supply a scientific basis to the belief in another world. She has a keen sense of humour—perhaps of all qualities the most indispensable. She has only one conspicuous drawback. She has never been married. But she has lived in the midst of family life. Her centre has ever been a home, not a barracks, a church, or a cell. She has loved passionately, suffered bitterly, and triumphed marvellously over a host of difficulties which love, disguised as jealousy, has sown around her path. She is free from all the unworthy and unnatural carping at man which characterizes some advanced women. She is, in short, more admirably qualified than any other living woman to be the leader and director of this great new force which is influencing the world So obvious does this appear that it is doubtful whether the time has not come to recognize that the union which she has helped create is bidding fair to realize more closely the ideal of the Church of God in America than any of the more distinctively ecclesiastical organizations can claim to be.

(To be continued.)

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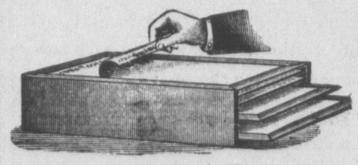

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