

The Sunday-School.

FIRST QUARTER.
LESSON XI.—Mar. 13.

DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Matt. 14: 1-12.

TEMPERANCE LESSON.

The lesson includes the three accounts, Matt. 14: 1-12; Mark 6: 14-29; Luke 8: 7-9; the message of John from his prison (Matt. 11: 2-19), together with a glance at the intervening story in Mark 5: 1-6, 13, and the instructions to the disciples, (Matt. 9: 27-11; 1).

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*—Rev. 2: 10.

HISTORICAL SETTING.—*Time.*—John was imprisoned in March or April, A. D. 28. He was beheaded a year later, in March or April, A. D. 29.

Place.—Jesus was in Galilee with his twelve disciples. John was imprisoned and put to death at Macherus, a strong fortress and castle on the borders of Arabia, nine miles east of the northern end of the Dead Sea.

John preached nearly two years, from the summer of A. D. 26 to the spring of A. D. 28. He was in prison one year, and was martyred at the age of 33.

Place in the Life of Jesus.—In the second half of the great Galilean ministry. A year before the crucifixion.

LEARN BY HEART.—Matt. 11: 10-12; Rev. 2: 7, 13; 7: 13-17.

INTRODUCTORY. We pass over Jesus' work during the winter of A. D. 28-29, mostly recorded in Mark 5: 1-6: 13. Jesus was making his third preaching tour of Galilee. He sent out his disciples, two by two, to help him in his labors and train them for their future work. It was during this tour that the martyrdom of John the Baptist took place.

THE TROUBLED CONSCIENCE.—Vs. 1, 2. *At that time.* Immediately following the death of John. Herod the tetrarch, Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great (who slew the Bethlehem innocents), and heir to one-fourth of his kingdom, Galilee and Perea. Hence he is called tetrarch, which means ruler of a fourth part. *Heard of the fame.* The report concerning Jesus. The many miracles wrought by Jesus and his disciples, and the doctrines he taught. *Said unto his servants.* His officers, who were discussing who this strange man might be. *This is John the Baptist, whom he had murdered, risen from the dead.* Herod was haunted by his crime. *Therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.* He thought that John had brought back with him powers which would use against his murderer.

THE FAITHFUL PROPHET REPROVES HIS KING.—Vs. 3-5. *For Herod had laid hold on John.* Arrested him. This was in March, A. D. 28. *In prison.* Josephus says that it was at Castle Macherus. *For Herodias' sake, his brother Philip's wife.* Herod was married to the daughter of Aretas, an Arabian king, but abandoned her for the sake of Herodias. Herodias was the wife of her uncle Philip, but she deserted him. Herod was guilty of the basest treachery to his brother. Herodias was an ambitious, unprincipled, but bewitching and ensnaring woman. She married Philip, expecting that he as oldest son would inherit the wealth and the king-

dom of his father, Herod the Great. But he was disinherited. Therefore she deserted him for his younger brother, who was rich and a king. *For John said.* It is possible he may have been invited to speak before the court. But more probably he went as Elijah to Ahab. *It is not lawful.* Herod, as we have seen, had broken laws of God and man. John was preaching against sin, denouncing crime to urge men to repentance, and he could not do this effectively to soldiers, publicans and Pharisees, if he let the sins in high places go unreprieved. Unrebuked crime in high places endorses and propagates crime among the people.

The consequences of this courageous performing of duty were (1) those whom he reproved became his bitter enemies; and (2) John's preaching career was ended, and he was compelled to languish in prison for a year. It was during this year that John, apparently discouraged and troubled in mind, sent two of his disciples to Jesus in Galilee to find out whether he really was the Messiah (Matt. 11: 2-19).

He would have put him to death, urged on by Herodias. Herodias must stop John's speaking, and death alone could do it. *He feared the multitude,* who might rise up in revolt, or report him to the emperor, if he killed a prophet. He feared John too (Mark), who with his mighty eloquence could arouse the people to revolt. There is nothing so cowardly as a guilty conscience, or so to be feared by evil-doers as a holy man who voices the truth of God.

THE BIRTHDAY FESTIVAL. A TEMPERANCE LESSON.—Vs. 6, 7. *When Herod's birthday was kept.* The festival was probably at Castle Macherus, where Josephus says that John was imprisoned. *The daughter of Herodias,* by her former husband. Her name was Salome. *Danced before them,* or sent by her mother to take advantage of Herod's condition when wine had warped his judgment and dulled his conscience. *Promised . . . to give her whatsoever she would ask.* Even to half of his kingdom (Mark); a reckless promise made by one who had lost his wits by drunkenness.

Temperance Applications.—This rash promise is an example of one of the greatest dangers of intoxicating liquors. Wine and strong drink distort the judgment long before they produce drunkenness.

A Kingdom for a Dance.—Herod was willing to give away half of his kingdom for the sight of an immoral dance. Poor fool! But how many in our day give away the whole kingdom of their souls for the paltry price of a glass of wine; the gratification of passion or pride; the acquisition of a little money! The race of Esau still lives, who sell their birthright for a mess of pottage.

THE MARTYRDOM OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.—Vs. 8-12. *And she, being before instructed of her mother.* She went to her mother and said, "What shall I ask?" Her mother replied in words Salome repeated to the king. *Give me here now.* For if not done before Herod has time to escape from the influence of the wine it might never be done. *John Baptist's head in a charger.* A large platter. *And the king was sorry.* Not penitent, but troubled. *Nevertheless for the oath's sake, and them which sat with him.* Pride and fear of

public opinion turned the scale. *He commanded it to be given her.* The wily Herodias had gained her desire. *Beheaded John in the prison.* At once. The request was answered in a very brief time. *His head was brought in a charger.* . . . *She brought it to her mother,* who thus seemed to have gained her object, but she really failed. She died in exile. John was silenced, but conscience and the voice of God were not silenced. *And went and told Jesus,* of whom John was the forerunner and friend. So should we go and tell Jesus all our troubles and works.

THE HEART OF THE LESSON.

A Successful Life is one that accomplishes the high purposes for which man was created.

Herod.—With all his seeming success his life was a failure. He fared sumptuously every day. He gained the wife he desired, Herodias. But their lives were a failure, for Herod's conscience was powerful enough to trouble him, though not enough to restrain him from sin. His success was brief as well as troubled. Herodias proved the curse and ruin of Herod. The people attributed all his later misfortunes to his murder of John the Baptist. On account of her there was a war with Aretas of Arabia, in which he was worsted. In A. D. 38, less than ten years after the murder of John, he was deprived of his dominions, and banished. Herod is pilloried in history. All ages see his crime like Cain's mark on his forehead.

John the Baptist.—Though John's life was short, and his work hard and of less than two years' duration, his life was truly successful. John finished the work that was given him to do. John's first success lay in the fact that he preserved his manhood and his character untarnished amid great temptations. He was gold tried in the fire. No man's life is a failure who is himself a moral success. John the Baptist has part in all the triumphs of Christianity for which he prepared the way. John lives through all ages by his example. The martyrdom of John is his strongest sermon, heard and felt everywhere. John holds up before all men an ideal of heroism, courage, faithfulness to duty. He is a perpetual inspiration.



ONE OF THE HELPS.

"I can't remember which nights John said he went to business college," said a puzzled Sunday school teacher, "and I want to be sure to have the boys come up on an evening when John can come. I shall have to wait and ask him."

Do you know how that teacher might have avoided the delay of having to wait and ask John? Get a small indexed blank book, and enter the name of each scholar, with his address, at the top of a blank page. When John tells you, in a burst of friendly confidence, that he works at Smith and Thomas's at five dollars a week, but that he goes to business college on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evening of each week, and intends to get a better position as soon as he can—put it down on the page under his name. Then you will know, by referring to the little book, when John is at liberty, and if you hear some good man saying that he wants a faithful boy in his office who can bear promotion, perhaps you may put in a word for John.

A teacher with a class of growing boys had them all at her home one evening, and during the evening passed around her birthday book for their sig-

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natures, with the date of birth. These she afterwards transferred to her private record, and now and then a boy is surprised by, "I hope you will have a very happy birthday next Tuesday, Will." There is a glow of appreciation in his heart and on his face because some one has remembered him.

A little "M.C." at the top of the page indicates which of the class are members of the church. Private marks of the teacher's own tell of the personal talks with the boys about their own souls. A date here tells when Bert's father died, and the number of younger brothers and sisters left for him to support. Harold's page shows that he came from Brooklyn, and that he has a talent for music, and plays the flute. The teacher remembers that flute, and shows an interest in his musical aspirations, asking him to play when the boys meet for a social evening.

There is a little notation on Chester's page that reminds the teacher that the boy has a passion for travel, though financially unable to indulge, and many a new book written by some charming traveler finds its way, as a loan, to Chester's house. She knows, and has made a note of, the courses taken by the high-school boys, the year they expect to graduate, and the vocation to which they may have shown a leaning. Some of the boys have left the city, but she has their addresses, and writes to them.

Perhaps with nothing else to do, and with a good memory, one might keep these things in mind, but to the ordinary busy teacher such a help to the memory means an added knowledge of the daily life of each pupil, and a consequent deepened interest in their welfare which cannot but help contribute to the true teacher's aim to lead all the souls in her keeping to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.—Grace Willis.

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