

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XLVI.

Nov. 16, } THE LOVE OF THE FATHER { 1 John iv.
1879. } 7-16.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"We love Him, because He first loved us." 1 John iv. 19.

HOME STUDIES.

M. 1 John ii. 1-29. Brotherly love.
T. 1 John iii. 1-24. Sons of God
W. 1 John iv. 1-21. The love of the Father
Th. 1 John v. 1-21. Eternal life.
F. 2 John i. 1-13. Walking in truth.
S. 3 John i. 1-14. Fellow-helpers to the truth.
Sab. Isa. xii. 1-6. God our salvation.

HELPS TO STUDY.

In the introduction to the last lesson it was stated that "love" is the main subject of the First Epistle of John. We find a spirit of Christian love breathing throughout the writings of this Apostle, although he is most energetic in denouncing sin and ungodliness.

In his Gospel he several times calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved"—as if the most remarkable thing that he could find about himself was the fact that Jesus loved him—and it is very evident that he loved Jesus in return; he shewed his love to his God and Saviour by spending his life in "labours of love" for the welfare of his fellow men.

Our present lesson begins with an exhortation to Christians to love one another, and in enforcing this exhortation he sets before us, (1) *God, the source of love*, (2) *The Manifestation of God's Love*, (3) *The Proof of our Love to God*.

I. GOD THE SOURCE OF LOVE.—vers. 7, 8.

Love—benevolence—is the motive that prompts to the doing of good. Only those actions which proceed from love are really good. A being who always does good must be always actuated by love.

God is love, for love is the sum of goodness, and God is good.

We can see that love is the sum of human goodness, for all human morality is comprehended in the Ten Commandments, and the sum of the Ten Commandments is to love God and to love our neighbour; and we are taught in this passage—whether we could infer as much by our own reason or not—that love is also the aggregate of divine goodness, the sum of all the qualities that make up the character of God.

Does God hate anything? Yes, He hates sin; that is the only thing He hates; and it is just because God is love that He hates sin; for the same love that induces any being to do good also prompts that being to oppose evil. Opposition to evil is one of the ways in which good may be done. The more God loves and pities the sinner the more He must hate the sin which is destroying that sinner.

Love is of God: God is the source and author of the love that prompts to the doing of good. It is implanted by Him in regeneration. Those who have it are born of God. It is not the natural growth of the human heart. The natural man, actuated by selfishness, knoweth not God; differs from God in first principles, and cannot in the smallest degree understand Him—entertains wrong views of His character and actions.

II. THE MANIFESTATION OF GOD'S LOVE.—vers. 9, 10.

Can the fact that "God is love," and the fact that He "will by no means clear the guilty" (Ex. xxiv. 7) be reconciled? Yes, a being who made no distinction between good and evil would not be a holy being; and the love that did not include holiness and justice would be imperfect. God will spare no one who confronts His justice with guilt resting upon him—He spared not His own Son when guilt (although it was the guilt of others) was imputed to Him—but He manifests His love to us in postponing the day of reckoning, thus giving time for repentance; and in devising a way in which guilt may be removed, so that there is no valid reason why any human being should meet God in judgment with his guilt resting upon his own head.

This admirable scheme of redemption, into which "the angels desire to look"—one says that the contemplation of it may possibly be a means of preserving them in their state of holiness—this wonderful plan of salvation, manifests the wisdom and the justice of God; but what is it that stands behind these attributes urging them both to action? It is love. Love prompted wisdom to devise the plan, and love urged justice to smite the shepherd that the sheep might go free.

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is the greatest manifestation of the love of God to man that ever was given; and it is also the greatest that could have been given: "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" (Isaiah v. 4).

No pardon was extended to the Saviour. He endured the punishment of all the guilt he bore. The words, "He saved others, Himself He cannot save" (Mark xv. 31) contain a meaning which those who uttered them in derision could not perceive. God is just; His justice is not in opposition to His love, but in full harmony with it; we cannot appeal from God's justice to His love; if His justice is against us His love is against us also; and when a sin is pardoned it is solely because the punishment of that sin has already been borne by the Saviour. That is what the preacher meant who, to arrest the attention of his hearers, uttered the terrible words, "God never pardons sin!" Every sin that ever was, or that ever will be, committed by a human being, either has been punished or else shall be punished. If his sins are pardoned to the believer, they were not pardoned to the Saviour.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His son to be the propitiation for our sins: From this verse it is quite evident that it is un-

scriptural to represent the death of Christ as procuring or purchasing the love of God for men. "He loved us, and—because he loved us—sent His son." On this point, the "Westminster Teacher" says: "Christ's death did not secure God's love, but it secured His pardoning mercy, and in respect to our sins, it made His mercy prevail instead of His wrath." It is equally unscriptural to speak of the love of God to us as being originated by our love to Him: "Not that we loved God, but that He loved us." The convert may possibly experience love to God in his own heart before he realizes the love of God to him; but when he examines the matter he finds that if God had not loved him first, he would never have loved God.

III. THE PROOF OF OUR LOVE TO GOD.—vers. 11-16. The love spoken of all through this lesson is no mere sentiment, but an active principle that always prompts to beneficence. It is so on the part of God; it is so also on the part of the Christian. The application of the lesson is: Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. Personally God is infinitely above being in need of our beneficence, and we cannot in any way conduce to His welfare. He directs us then to shew our love to Him by putting forth efforts for the welfare of our fellow men—especially those of them who are His people. If we love God we will also love those who are His.

No man hath seen God at any time: God is a spirit and not visible to the eye of sense; and although Christ shewed himself on earth, He is not visible here now. But we can see the people of God on earth; we can see our fellow beings: we can see that many of them are in need of our good offices; and Christ says: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. xxv. 40).

THE APOSTLE JOHN—AFTER CHRIST'S RESURRECTION.

The principal significance of the earthly life of the apostle John, subsequent to the resurrection of Christ, is found in the fact that John far outlived the rest of the apostles. Thus he formed the link between the Apostolic and the Primitive Church. That such a vital link should exist, was of great importance. It was, for many reasons, desirable that some inspired disciple should survive the period of early growth the principles and the spirit which Christ Himself imparted; to produce the closing records of the New Testament, after the destruction of Jerusalem had opened a new day for Christianity; to meet, by inspired language, the errors which were sure to poison the life of the Church as soon as philosophy should give its attention to the new religion; to instruct the coming generation, in which the formulation of the truths of Christianity was to begin.

SELECTED FOR A PURPOSE.

That John was selected for this purpose, we infer from the mysterious words of the Saviour, just before His ascension. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee." John xxi. 22. That he was well fitted for the service to be rendered, is shown by a study of his character and of his personal relations to the Lord. He was a "Son of Thunder," a man of native vigour and of powerful impulses. He was subdued by grace so as to lose nothing of his force, yet so as to win and mould his great heart. He was a man of quick intuitions and of marvellous spirituality. He not only lay upon his Master's breast, but saw farther into his heart than any other. At the same time, his peculiarities of mind enabled him to discern at a glance the dreamy errors of Oriental philosophy. He saw the true spiritualism of Christianity and the false spiritualism of Asiatic thought, with equal clearness, and could draw the sharp line between them. This statement prepares us to review the service he actually rendered.

HIS LATER LIFE.

For the facts of his life, after the resurrection of Christ, we are dependent first upon Scripture; then upon the ordinary resources of history. What is gathered from the Bible is infallible. What comes from the testimony of uninspired men must be tested by the common rules of criticism. The outline, so far as we can safely define it, is this: For eight days after the resurrection he remained in Jerusalem. During a portion of the thirty days following, he pursued his avocation as a fisherman at the Lake of Galilee. After the ascension, he partook in the scenes of the petecostal revival. Then, for fifteen years, at least, he resided at Jerusalem. At some period anterior to the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, he repaired to Ephesus; probably soon after the martyrdom of Paul, A.D. 64. Here the real work of his later life began. That he was reserved for this, is indicated by the silence which rests on the thirty years previous to A.D. 64—years which were so crowded by the labours of Peter and of Paul. In 64, John was left in the Church, the sole representative of the apostolic band; so far, at least, as history gives us any record.

In Ephesus, John was located at the most important centre of influence in Asia Minor; and Asia Minor was destined to be, as Schaft puts it, "the main theatre of the church's action in the next stadium of her history." Here he came in closest contact with Oriental heresy. Here he established direct relations with the "seven churches" named in the Apocalypse. Here he became the teacher of Polycarp, afterward Bishop of Smyrna, and one of the leaders of the "glorious army of the martyrs." Here also, it is supposed, such men as Papias and Ignatius resorted to him for instruction. Here he wrote his Gospel and his Epistles.

HIS GOSPEL.

It is impossible accurately to fix the date of the Gospel which bears his name. It was probably written about A.D. 90. It was certainly written after the other three Gospels had become familiar, and was designed to afford a sequel to them, or rather to occupy the quadrant they did not fill. Its spirituality, as adapting it to the church universal, is manifest. Its bold antagonism to Asiatic philosophy is shown by its opening sentences. The half-matured Gnosticism of the day babbled of

a *Logos* or Word, who was only an emanation from God, and of another emanation who was responsible for the creation of the world in whose very substance evil resides. Against this theory John launches, with the sudden force of inspiration, such sentences as these: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The whole fabric of Gnosticism, even as afterward reared, goes down before the first fourteen verses of this Gospel. Allusions to the same heresy are found in John's Epistles. Cerinthus was the "grievous wolf" who mainly troubled him, if Eusebius and Irenaeus are to be credited. What we know of the natural heat of John's indignation, gives some colour to the tradition that on once encountering Cerinthus at a public bath, he fled from the place in haste, saying that he feared the roof would fall on such an enemy to the truth.

THE REVELATION.

The Apocalypse was written at Patmos, a rocky island not far from Ephesus, to which John was banished, as most authors agree, by the tyrant Domitian, near the close of his reign. This fixes the date of the last book in the Bible at about the year 96, when Domitian died, and John was permitted to return to Ephesus. Our limits forbid an analysis of the Apocalypse. The line of Sabbath study takes us, at present, into some of its most precious passages, and carries us on and up to the recovered Paradise and to the "city which hath foundations." With its production the mortal life of John might well close. We know not when that life ended. We can well believe that as the evening came, he sat under the radiant sunset. We can accept the story that in his last hours he used to sit among his people, feeble, but with glowing face, repeating over and over the parting words, "Little children, love one another." The traces of his influence are abundant in the earliest records of the fathers. With him the first century fades into the second. Yet his work, though so important in the process, abides imperishable in the writings which will still be among the most precious in the Bible, when the visions he saw in Patmos shall become the substance of the last chapter in the history of the globe.

THE SOONER THE EASIER.

Ella A. Drinkwater tells, in the "Sunday School Times," of an incident that is a most forcible illustration of the necessity of "lifting up the lads," instead of waiting until they become men. A gentleman was telling some children how he had been lifted up by his teacher when a mere boy, so that he could see over the top of the high old-fashioned pews, and give testimony as to his conversion. The teacher, now old, was sitting by, and interrupted the narrator to give the children this impressive lesson:

"I'll show you how I lifted him, children," exclaimed the old man in his quavering voice, rising painfully from his chair, and making his slow way across the breadth of carpeting that separated them; "I lifted him so," placing his wrinkled, trembling hands under the strong man's arms; but he could not lift him a hair's-breadth. "Ah, children, always remember this," admonished the old man turning to them; "I boosted him when he was a boy, but I couldn't do it now! He was easy to lift then, but now he has nearly two hundred pounds of flesh. It's the boys that may be lifted, and not the men, weighed down by flesh or sin."

THE SABBATH SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT.

The "National Sunday School Teacher" thus corrects a mistake into which some superintendents fall: "There are some superintendents who do too much. They take too great a proportion of the work upon themselves instead of seeing that it is equally divided. Like mettlesome horses, they spring forward at the word, and tug away after a fashion that must move the load, or break a trace, or burst a blood-vessel. Although this is the right sort of a disposition to have as a subordinate, it is not the best in the world to have as a leader. No school will make much progress under such a superintendent. A superintendent should be an organizer as well as a worker. He should have the ability to get work out of other people. His intense energy should be utilized like that of an engine in a basement, that sets all the machinery of a factory to going, but does none of the weaving itself. It is better for the church, and better for the man, to have one man set ten others to labouring than for him to do the work of ten men."

DR. JOHN HALL advises all ministers to teach Bible-classes. "There are a hundred things," he says, "that you would not think of making the subject of a sermon that could be used in the Bible-class." He might have added that there are a hundred things concerning his parishioners that a minister will there find out, that he never would learn at the long range of the pulpit.

A ROME despatch says the Vatican will shortly send a *Charge d'Affaires* to Turkey to carry out the convention about to be signed, after which an inter-nuncio and several bishops will be appointed.

THE Bishop of Manchester, in a recent sermon on the existing depression, said it was something appalling to think of a nation in seeming poverty yet living so licentiously, spending £140,000,000 of money on strong drink, and another £15,000,000 on tobacco. The intemperance of the nation was increasing. This was most humiliating to a Christian country, and he believed if we did not use more care with reference to our desires and appetites we should fail to see our true duty. We were at present undergoing the chastening of a wise and kind God, and his exhortation was for them to humble themselves before God.