

## Christ and Nicodemus.\*

Written for the Dominion Presbyterian.

There are some texts which Luther called "Little Bibles," because they contain in a few words the essence of the great Evangel. Such an one is the Golden Text for this week: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Here we have a great love, which is the source of our life, of revelation and of salvation; and then we have a great gift. A great love must express itself in a great gift; this depends not on the merits of the receivers but on the divinity of the givers. The only measure of the "so" is the gift of "the only-begotten Son," out of these two there comes a great opportunity; through faith men may enter into eternal life. How solemn our life becomes in the face of a gift which makes possible such a wonderful destiny. But we have begun at the end of the lesson; reverently we have penetrated into the inmost shrine of the great temple of Gospel truth. Now we must retrace our steps and regard the lesson as an appropriate entrance to this high revelation. Our Lord had the art of speaking to the crowd. "The common people heard Him gladly," but He did not despise the audience of one; the sublimest revelations were made to individuals, to Nicodemus, and the woman of Samaria, and through them to us. The private teaching, which seemed so insignificant at the time, was destined to have the most powerful and permanent influence. What a mighty influence has been exerted upon the world by what has been appropriately called "The Training of the Twelve." Let us be thankful, then, that the Apostle of love has preserved for us this wonderful conversation. It shows us the intense interest aroused in the teaching of Our Lord, when one in high official position came secretly to enquire as to its nature and application. We will not denounce him for coming stealthily, our courage is not of such a high order that we can afford to do that. We are glad that he came at all, it is not the most impulsive and demonstrative who stand the greatest strain. Our Lord did not denounce the man's timidity, but rather rebuked his coarse materialistic conceptions of the religious life. "A teacher in Israel," with the noblest prophecies and sweetest psalms open to him, ought not to have stumbled so stupidly at the doctrine of the new birth; and yet we, with our still greater light, marvel at the mystery.

A compliment is met by the statement of a great principle; to see the Kingdom of God, to live in it, and so "to seek first the kingdom of God," implies a new birth. To enter into the new

kingdom we must be born from above, or born anew. If a man takes this in a crude, mechanical way, he must be reminded that such new birth is absolutely necessary. Every being begets its own kind; from the flesh can only come flesh, and the spiritual life must come from a spiritual source. Why should we marvel at this when it is the law of all life? The truth is mysterious, certainly; can we expect that which concerns the highest life to be made plain to our poor senses? Many things we know as facts of which we cannot explain the "how;" it is of far greater importance to have experience of the reality than to have this question answered: "How can these things be?" We have the testimony of one who knows; His own life is the great proof that He came from the heavenly sphere, that He who loved to call Himself the "Son of man" is also the Son of God. Something of the life which He brings from heaven in His own person He will impart to us by the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as Paul tells us: "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation." But this cannot come about by mere teaching. Our Lord Jesus is more than "a teacher sent from God." Such was John the Baptist, 1, 6. The Saviour must vivify His teaching by His sacrifice; "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the son of man be lifted up." From the beginning of His ministry the great teacher walked steadily towards the Cross. It is true the Cross was in His life, as He met the carelessness and stupidity of men "enduring the contradiction of sinners against Himself." But the complete sacrifice was offered in Gethsemane and on Calvary God's eternal spirit of self-sacrifice was incarnate there. Taking away the symbolic sacrifices He substituted the sacrifice of a living obedience. He came to do the will of the Father by the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Not in the dim light through which Nicodemus gropes, but in the light of the Cross; in this "lifting up" which is to draw all men, can we understand the great saying with which we begin and end our meditation "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

## Explanatory Notes.

After a short time spent in Galilee Jesus went to the passover at Jerusalem, where he cleansed the temple and worked miracles.—Pharisees (v. 1). One of the leading sects of the Jews marked by the strictness of the rules laid down about keeping the law.—Ruler (v. 1). A member of the Sanhedrin. (John 7:50.)—Rabbi (v. 2). A title of honor meaning "teacher."—Anew (v. 3). The word may also mean "from above," as

shown by the reading in the margin; but the more probable sense is that of "anew."—Ye (v. 7). This is emphatic, as referring to one holding even the position of Nicodemus. At the same time, it separates Jesus from others.—Wind (v. 8). Although unquestionably correctly translated, the word here is the same that is translated "Spirit" in the last part of the verse. This would make the illustration more forcible.—The teacher (v. 10). The position of Nicodemus made his ignorance of these matters the more remarkable.

## Was the trial sore?

Temptation sharp? Thank God a second time! Why comes temptation but for man to meet And master, and make crouch beneath his foot, And so be pedestalled in triumph? Pray "Lead us into no such temptations, Lord!" Yea, but, O Thou whose servants are the bold, Lead such temptations by the head and hair, Reluctant dragons, up to who dares fight, That so he may do battle and have praise.

—Browning.

## Strong Feelings.

From a missionary exchange the following paragraph was taken, which shows the strong anti-Christian feeling which exists in Egypt: "An Egyptian society, in Cairo, representing young Egypt, formed to promote patriotic feeling among Moslems, was prevented by the governor from enacting a new play a few weeks since, which held this passage: Good Moslems should pray the prophet that God may cause a catastrophe sufficient to annihilate all Christians. It also held this situation, also, too true to life: the sultan was represented sitting on a throne, while the seven European powers were kissing his feet."

Principal Fairbairn landed at Bombay on November 18. He was welcomed by a group of representative missionaries, and attended the same evening a conference held at the Young Women's Christian Association. On the following evening a reception was given in his honor by one of the leading Parsees of Bombay, and on the next day (Sunday) he preached in the Presbyterian church. During his stay in Bombay he was the guest of the Principal of Wilson College. The course of lectures which Dr. Fairbairn is delivering in India is entitled "Religions and the Philosophy of Religion."

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It is stated that the second son of the King of Korea, the heir-apparent to the throne, has been sent to the United States to be educated, and has been placed under the care of the Rev. Dr. Ellinwood, one of the secretaries of the Presbyterian Board of Missions. If this be so it is a remarkable sign of the times.

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This is the true education: "Teach me to do thy will." This was the education of Christ.—Professor Drummond.

\*S.S. Lesson for January 22: John III, 1-16. Golden Text, 16.