

The Sunday School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XXIX.

July 28, 1879. } CHRISTIAN LOVE. } Cor. xiii. 1-13

F GOLDEN TEXT.—"And now abideth, faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."—1 Cor. xiii. 13.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Matt. xiii. 34-46. . . . The sum of the law.
T. Rom. xiii. 8-10. . . . Love the fulfilling of the law.
W. John xiii. 31-38. . . . A new commandment.
Th. 1 John iii. 10-24. . . . "In deed and in truth."
F. 1 John iv. 7-21. . . . Brotherly love.
S. 1 Cor. xiii. 1-13. . . . Christian love.
S. Ps. cxxxiii. 1-3. . . . Brethren in unity.

HELPS TO STUDY.

Paul wrote from Ephesus this letter to the Corinthians, in reply to one he had received (1 Cor. vii. 1), as well as in reference to various reports he had received of the disorders which had crept into that Church. In it he rebukes and sets in order the abuses which he learnt were prevalent, and answers the questions which had been submitted to him. Very prominent among these topics was the nature and value, use and abuse of the various miraculous gifts of tongues, prophecy, miracles, healing, &c., with which the holy spirit endowed the Apostolic Church. But there is that which is greater than all these gifts, without which the highest and best of them is empty and worthless; it is the central and supreme grace of Christianity—LOVE (Note 1.) The Apostle first insists upon its necessity; then, with a pencil dipped in light, he draws its portrait radiant with beauty; and, lastly, he describes its permanence, the most brilliant gifts were transient, this alone endured.

I. THE NECESSITY OF LOVE—VERS. 1-3.

1. As compared with all the gifts a man can possess.

a. The gift of tongues. This was one of the most striking of all the supernatural endowments conferred upon these primitive Christians. It was a power by which the man in an ecstasy of prayer and praise was constrained to utter his thoughts in a language which he had not learned and did not understand. St. Paul is not appreciating the gift, but he labours to show how carefully dependent it is upon love to give it value. "Supposing," he says, "that I am a speaker with tongues, from whom all possible kinds of tongues might be heard, not simply those of men, but also far more wonderful and exalted still—those of angels." He thus describes the very loftiest of all conceivable cases, and asserts the utterances even of one so richly endowed are, without love, empty as a tinkling cymbal, discordant as sounding brass.

b. Prophecy, the power to speak for God, to utter the Divine Will either in prediction or instruction, and closely connected with this gift of utterance is the power to understand all mysteries, the revealed secrets of the Divine counsel and all knowledge, that is, the apprehension of the truth with the mind and intellect.

c. Faith, not true saving faith which ever worketh by love—Gal. v. 6, but such faith as is possible without love, such as that which the devils have who believe and tremble, or such as that strong herculean confidence in self or in destiny, such as men like Napoleon possessed, and by which they worked wonders, moved mountains of difficulty. The Corinthian Church itself furnished a striking illustration of the worthlessness of gifts apart from love. In all they were enriched.—1 Cor. i. 5, 7. Yet we find among them strife and immorality, disorder and jealousy in the use of the gifts themselves, and even doubts as to Our Lord's resurrection. We speak of "gifted" people as though it were the highest praise we could bestow. And how many are gifted with strength, knowledge, beauty, and yet vain, envious, irritable; not gifts, but love, make a man worthy. "Gifts are what we have, love is what we are."

2. As compared with all the sacrifices a man can make.

a. Gifts. Though I bestow, literally "dole away in mouthfuls," all my goods in charity which wants the spirit of charity, what profit is it? A gift without love is often but an insult. It is only given to be "seed of men," and has no claim to gratitude.

b. Martyrdom—my body to be burned, a self-sacrifice not prompted by love, but by pride and vanity—"an unlovely and counterfeit martyr-spirit." It has often been found in times of persecution that many who lived unworthily were ready to die for their religion. No sacrifice which springs from pride, presumption, or obstinacy can profit. We cannot buy heaven by such gifts. To all such workers Christ will say, "Depart, I never knew you"—Matt. vii. 21-23; Luke xiii. 25-27.

II. THE PORTRAIT OF LOVE—VERS. 4-7.

Twice seven traits are enumerated. Love suffereth long, withholds her anger, overcomes her indignation; is kind, literally "willing to be useful" and to do good even to those who oppose themselves and do not deserve it; envieth not, how can it? for in loving others it wisheth them all good; vaunteth not itself, is no braggart, does not swagger; is not puffed up, inflated with vanity and self-conceit, is not wise in its own eyes, but is humble; doth not behave itself unseemly, is decorous, does nothing of which one ought to be ashamed; seeketh not its own interest, or pleasure, or reputation—1 Cor. x. 24; is ready to give up its own rights as Abraham—Gen. xiii. 1; is not

easily provoked, for anger cannot abide where love holds sway and controls passion and reproof; thinketh no evil, is not ready to impute evil motives or to find fault; rejoiceth not at iniquity, at the faults and sins of others, or at the calamities which overtake them, does not sympathize with evil, but rejoiceth at the truth, with the triumphs and blessings of the truth, its sympathy is with the progress of good, and the well-being of men; beareth all things, holds out under all privations, troubles, toils without ceasing to love, or as it may be equally correctly translated covereth all things, hides the errors and failings of others as far as it can; believeth all things, shows itself of trustful nature, does not surmise and suspect, but is more inclined to take for granted the existence of a good unseen, believes in the transgressor when no one else does; hopeth all things, hopes for the best with regard to all, hopes even against hope, and when others have ceased to hope good of another; endureth all things, as a woman for her husband, a mother for her children; love gives strength and courage. Such is love—the sum total of the commandments (Matt. xxii. 36-40; 1 Tim. i. 5); the "fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xii. 10), the first of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. v. 22), the crown of all Christian virtues (2 Pet. i. 7), the bond or girdle that binds all perfections together. (Col. iii. 14.)

III. THE PERMANENCE OF LOVE.—VERS. 9-13.

Love is imperishable; all gifts are transitory, prophecies, tongues, knowledge, cease and vanish away. The apostle proceeds to prove this in the case of the first and third. Our knowledge is partial, and when we attain to a clearer, fuller, more accurate knowledge, assuredly that which we now have shall be superseded. Our prophecies now are in part, our utterances and unfoldings of truth are imperfect and insufficient. They will certainly give place to what is more exact and complete.

The apostle adds two illustrations to make his meaning clearer. 1. The man puts away his childish things. Once they were necessary. Without them he could not have attained to manhood, but being a man he has outgrown them. The child needs primers, but in the maturity of the man's knowledge there is no room for such helps. 2. We now see through a glass, that is, a mirror, which, as they were made in ancient days afforded a very dim, uncertain and distorted picture. Darkly, literally, in an enigma; and certainly many things are riddles to us, first because our knowledge of them is so defective. Such is knowledge of earth compared with the clear knowledge of heaven, when we shall see God face to face. When we awake in His likeness, we shall be satisfied.—Ps. xvii. 15; Matt. v. 8.

EXPLANATORY NOTE.

1. Charity.—The original Greek word here rendered *charity* means *love*, and this was the meaning of *charity* when our translation was made. The change of meaning which the word has undergone is a process of contraction, — *charity*, which originally meant love, being now limited to certain manifestations of it, as in almsgivings, forbearance towards the supposed or admitted frailties of others, &c. No single word in any language will express the fullness of the Christian grace here spoken of, therefore the description is needed which is given from the fourth to the seventh verses. The simpler term "love," though too general exactly to meet the case, is now the best equivalent.

Official Notices.

THE following sums have been received in behalf of the Labrador Mission: Central Mission S. School, \$6; Congregational Church, Eaton, \$3; Mrs. (Rev.) Anderson, Orleans, County N. Y., \$2; Kingston Congregational Church infant class, \$5; Oro, Bethesda S. School, \$3; Mrs. (Rev.) McGregor, Listowel, \$1.

B. WILKES.

Around the Table.

THE LITTLE ROCKING CHAIR.

IT was a beautiful home, one whose memory would warm and brighten the coming years, let their experiences be what they may.

It was a Christian home, where a father's voice hallowed by prayer the morning hour, and made the evening hour sacred also in its ascription of praise to the Giver of so many mercies.

And yet in that pleasant home were vacant places, and the echo of small feet in the distance, treading with thousands of little ones the shining streets of the New Jerusalem, a precious reminder of the house not made with hands which resounds continually with sweet young voices whose cadence will never know a tone of sadness.

And there it stood in the sun-filled room, the tiny rocking-chair, waiting for its wee

owner. How suggestive it was of cherished little ones who, rejoicing in a like possession, rock away the untrammelled years with the fresh morning dew of youth glistening undimmed upon their heads.

The dear little feet must go out from Christian homes, away from their precious associations, and the little rocking-chair will no longer retain the happy forms which took such abiding comfort in their embrace. The oft-returning tears of childhood have been chased away by its soothing power, while to its motion glad time has been kept by sweet young voices.

How many, the broad world over, have, in memoriam, homes hallowed by a mother's prayers and unselfish love; and how vividly tender memory rises in the contemplation of these little chairs. Peace be to such homes, and the Good Shepherd guide the little feet, as they go out from their sheltering care, unto himself!

Hearts must grow weary and hands tired, but when the flickering shadows of life's closing day can outline the tiny rockers, and the sweet home influence bridge the past and present, the aged pilgrim almost within the golden gates of heaven will echo with those who have not yet reached the meridian of life, God bless the wee occupants of the little rocking-chair.

HELP YOUR TEACHER.

IF the teacher can do the scholar much good, it is equally true that the scholar can do much good to the teacher. Many a teacher would be utterly discouraged but for his one promising pupil. The attention and interest manifested by that one member of his class strengthen him more than he knows to labour for the others who are more refractory. The fact that there is one whose eye speaks a cordial welcome, whose voice is ready intelligently to answer, and whose whole deportment shows a warm appreciation of the pains that the teacher is taking, is so sweet a reward as to make him redouble his exertions to win from the others also a like grateful recognition. Every teacher has something to be grateful for who has one such pupil in his class.

A LITTLE boy, for a trick, pointed with his finger to the wrong road when a man asked him which way the doctor went. As a result, the man missed the doctor and his little boy died, because the doctor came too late to take a fishbone from his throat. At the funeral, the minister said that "the boy was killed by a lie, which another boy told with his finger." I suppose that the boy did not know the mischief he did. Of course nobody thinks he meant to kill a little boy when he pointed the wrong way. He only wanted to have a little fun, but it was fun that cost somebody a great deal; and if he ever heard of the results of it, he must have guilty of doing a mean and wicked thing. We ought never to trifle with the truth.