

The Sunday School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XXXVI

Sept. 7, 1879. } THE COMING OF THE LORD { 1 Thess. iv. 13-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"And so shall we ever be with the Lord."—1 Thess. iv. 17.

HOME STUDIES.

- M. Matt. xxiv. 29-42. The elect gathered.
 T. Matt. xxv. 31-46. The last judgment.
 W. Acts i. 1-11. Christ's second coming.
 Th. 1 Thess. i. 1-12. Glorified in His saints.
 F. 1 Thess. iv. 13-18. The coming of the Lord.
 S. John xiv. 1-13. Many mansions.
 S. 1 John iii. 1-8. "We shall see Him as He is."

HELPS TO STUDY.

Few of the places to which the epistles of Paul were sent are now in existence. Thessalonica, to the church at which the epistle that contains our lesson was sent, not only exists but is at the present day one of the most important cities in the Turkish Empire. Even its name—Salonica—is nearly the same as it was in Paul's time. He visited the city twice, first in company with Silas and Timothy on his second missionary tour (Acts xvii. 1-12), again on his third missionary journey (Acts xx. 1-3), perhaps also after his release from his first imprisonment at Rome, Phil. i. 25, 26; ii. 24; 1 Tim. i. 3; 2 Tim. iv. 13; Titus iii. 12. Jason, Gaius (Acts xix. 29), Secundus (Acts xx. 4), Aristarchus (Col. iv. 10; Philemon 24; Acts xix. 29), were natives of this city, and among Paul's most efficient helpers. In Acts xvii. 1-9 we find an account of the founding of the Thessalonian church by Paul in company with Silas and Timothy. The message of Paul was joyfully received by a great multitude of devout Greeks, and by chief women not a few. The majority of the Jews, however, rejected his message, and very soon compelled its deliverer to fly for his life. They also prevented his return to the city to finish the work which he had begun, ii. 18. He afterwards learned that the believers there had dwelt too much upon the speedy coming of Christ, had even neglected their business (2 Th. ii. 1; iii. 6, 11, 12), and were in distress of mind lest their Christian friends who had already fallen asleep in the Lord should fail to share in the blessings of the advent, and in the passage before us he puts them right on these points. The topics of the lesson are, (1) *Asleep in Jesus*, (2) *Alive with Jesus*.

I. ASLEEP IN JESUS.—VERS. 13-14. The Thessalonian Christians and others are here taught that there is no occasion for hopeless sorrow regarding them which are asleep in Jesus, or for any fear that they shall not participate in the benefits and advantages of the Lord's coming just as fully as those who may happen to be alive when He comes. The believer may sorrow over the death of Christian friends but not as others who have no hope—not as the heathen or the infidel, or the sceptic. To the Christian death is but a sleep—a state from which there shall be an awakening—and even this refers only to the body; the soul of the departed believer is not dead nor even asleep, but fully alive, awake, and in the enjoyment of happiness. At the resurrection the body shall be raised—a glorified body—and reunited to the happy soul. And what is the foundation of the Christian's hope in this respect? It is the fact that Jesus died and rose again, the "first fruits of them which slept," the promise and earnest of a universal resurrection; for even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him. Their souls are not in the grave; they are in heaven; and when He comes He will bring them with Him. If we believe in the resurrection of Christ, we must also believe in the resurrection of those who are Christ's. "If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen," (1 Cor. xv. 13). Because He lives we shall live also. All comfort concerning departed friends, and concerning the future for ourselves, rests upon our belief in a resurrection through Christ.

II. ALIVE WITH JESUS.—VERS. 15-18. It is supposed by some, from the use of the word *we* in the fifteenth verse, that Paul expected to be alive at the coming of Christ. But it does not necessarily so indicate. It does show, perhaps, that he thought there was a possibility of such a thing, but nothing more. The fact that it was taught by him that the Saviour might come at any time, rather sustains his view. And yet, from his second letter to them (ii. 3), it is plain that he did not regard that event as immediate. Whether he thought that it might happen before he was taken to be with Christ through death does not appear. The time of His coming was one of the things that was not revealed to him, nor to any one of the inspired writers. One commentator says that this "we" was an affectionate identification of himself with the Christians of all ages. It is equivalent to saying: "Whichever of us are alive." Shall not prevent: The word prevent literally means *come before or precede*; and it was so used by English writers at the time that the Bible was translated. The Psalmist, in Psalm cxix. 147, says: "I prevented [came before or preceded] the dawning of the morning and cried." In the lesson it evidently means that those who are alive at the second coming shall have no precedence or advantage over those who may have fallen asleep in Jesus before that event takes place. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout: *Himself*—not a deputy, not a phantom—"This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts i.

11). The word here translated "shout" occurs but once in the New Testament, though it is frequently met with in classical Greek where it denotes the command or signal given by a general or admiral or captain of rowers. "The hour is coming in the which all that are in their graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth" (John v. 28). The last clause of verse 16 reads along with the first clause of verse 17: *And the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds.* The apostle's argument is that the living believers shall have no advantage over the dead in Christ, for before the former are caught up the latter shall rise, and they shall all be caught up together. There may or there may not be two separate resurrections—one for the righteous and one for the wicked—but this passage says nothing whatever about the matter; though, when the last clause of the sixteenth verse is improperly read out of its connection, it may appear to do so. *And so we shall ever be with the Lord:* The anticipation of that fact is the believer's greatest joy now, as the actual enjoyment of it will crown his happiness then. Many questions arise in connection with these great events the answers to which have not been revealed to us because it is not needful for us to know them; but enough has been revealed to teach us how to live for Christ now so that we may meet Him with joy when He comes, whenever that may be, and be with Him where He is, wherever that may be. This is the time for work. Let us work like those who expect the Master—nay, let us work like those upon whom the Master's eye is now fixed.

on the fabric, which did not smoke nor blaze, but only assumed a red-hot appearance. A few moments passed, and the monarch raised it from the furnace unharmed and white as snow.

"A miracle! a miracle!" they all exclaimed.

"No, good friends," answered the king; "this cloth is woven of a substance which fire purifies, but cannot destroy. It was known to the Greeks, who named it Asbestos, meaning, unchanged by fire; and an Italian writer, who had lived hundreds of years before our time, speaks of a cloth made from some vegetable product which could not be injured by heat. Another mentioned, with apparent sincerity, that it was manufactured 'from the hair of certain rats that lived in volcanoes.' We read, also, that the marvellous cloth was used to wrap the dead before placing them on the funeral pile, that their ashes might be gathered separate from those of the wood."

Thus spoke the mighty Emperor for the instruction and edification of his guests.

While Charlemagne did not quite partake of the wild fancies of the Southern nations, it is not probable that he had a clear idea of the real structure of this mysterious substance. As the time advanced, it was fully understood; and now that it has become of practical use, we cannot glance at a newspaper without seeing the advertisement, "Asbestos Materials."

Asbestos is a fibrous variety of a dark-coloured rock resembling iron ore; this is known by the name of hornblende. Pyroxene, another mineral, also assumes this appearance, but not so often as the former.

We cannot understand how one of the toughest stones can be transformed into a substance as soft, flexible and white as floss silk; neither can we comprehend how the sparkling diamond is produced from charcoal. Yet we must accept these facts and try to learn all about them.

When the hard rock took this beautiful form, it was called by the Greeks amianthus, meaning undefiled, in reference to the ease of cleansing it by fire. This name is now used to distinguish it from the coarser and more impure varieties known as asbestos. It occurs in narrow seams in the rock, and is occasionally found in fibres two-thirds of a yard long. These have a rich satin lustre, and the slender filaments can easily be separated one from the other. A single one, if thrown into the fire, changes into a drop of enamelled glass, while a quantity can be heated without producing any change.

The silk-like appearance of amianthus gave to some ingenious ladies the thought of carding, spinning and weaving it into cloth of different degrees of fineness. Purses, gloves, caps, handkerchiefs and napkins were made of it, and sometimes articles were knitted from the soft, exquisite thread. The inhabitants of the Pyrenees wore girdles made of this substance, mingled with silver, which they

Around the Table.

THE LITTLE CAVALIER.

He walks beside his mother,
 And looks up in her face;
 He wears a glow of boyish pride
 With such a royal grace!
 He proudly waits upon her;
 Would shield her without fear—
 The boy who loves his mother well,
 Her little cavalier.

To see no tears of sorrow
 Upon her loving cheek,
 To gain her sweet, approving smile,
 To hear her softly speak—
 Ah! what in all this wide world
 Could be to him so dear?
 The boy who loves his mother well,
 Her little cavalier.

Look for him in the future
 Among the good, the true:
 All blessings on the upward way
 His little feet pursue.
 Of robed and crowned and sceptred kings
 He stands the royal peer—
 The boy who loves his mother well,
 Her little cavalier.

—George Cooper, in *The Nursery*.

CHARLEMAGNE'S TABLE-CLOTH.

AIX-LA-CHAPELLE was one of the favourite resources of Charlemagne. There were often assembled the lords and ladies of his court, with his own family, which consisted of several sons and one beautiful daughter. He was the most intelligent and powerful monarch of his time; his dominions were more extensive than those of the Roman Emperors had ever been. It is more than a thousand years since his death, yet his fame will endure to the end of time.

In the midst of the splendour of his position he was quite simple in his tastes, and was particularly devoted to literature and science. Among his most intimate friends and admirers were men renowned for their learning.

One day, after a grand entertainment had taken place in the palace, the guests were amused to see a page enter, and, on bended knee, present to his royal master a salver, on which was carelessly folded a soiled white table-cloth. Charlemagne, not in the least surprised, threw it into a fire, evidently prepared for the purpose. All eyes were fixed