

The Sunday School.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS.

LESSON XLVIII.

Nov. 30, 1879. } THE MESSAGE TO THE CHURCHES. { Rev. iii. 1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Hold thou fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."—Rev. iii. 11.

HOME STUDIES.

M. Rev. iii. 1-6 Sardis.
T. Rev. iii. 7-13 Philadelphia.
W. Rev. iii. 14-22 Laodicea.
Th. Matt. xxiv. 42-51 Watchfulness enjoined.
F. Matt. x. 32-42 Confessing Christ.
S. Rev. vii. 1-17 White robes.
Sab. Rev. xix. 1-16 The righteousness of saints.

HELPS TO STUDY.

In the last lesson we found that John was commissioned to write this Book of Revelation, including a message to each of the seven churches of Asia, situated respectively at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.

These messages are contained in the second and third chapters. They describe the spiritual condition of the various churches and convey to them admonitions, rebukes, warnings, threatenings, commendations, encouragements and promises, suitable and profitable to them and to other churches and individuals.

Our lesson is limited to two of these messages—that to Sardis and that to Philadelphia—but the endeavours of teachers and scholars to understand these two will be much aided by a careful study of the whole seven.

There are four things common to the seven messages:—

1. Each message is introduced by a description of the Sender—the Saviour—specifying some of His characteristics.
2. Seven times—once in each message—are the words repeated, "I know thy works."

3. Seven times also, we meet with the words, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches," rendering each particular message applicable to all churches, and to all individuals, situated in circumstances similar to those of the church primarily addressed.

4. Seven promises, or clusters of promises—one in each message—are made to "him that overcometh."

The two messages which form the subject of our present lesson present a striking contrast, suggesting the following division: (1) *Nominal Christianity—Profession without Practice*, (2) *Real Christianity—Profession and Practice*.

I. **NOMINAL CHRISTIANITY—PROFESSION WITHOUT PRACTICE.**—vers. 1-6. The stern rebuke contained in the message to the Church of Sardis is prompted, not by hatred or ill-will, but by love. To the Church of the Laodiceans, rebuked with at least equal severity, the Saviour says (ver. 19), "As many as I love I rebuke and chasten."

Even the false professor of religion, instead of being stripped of his borrowed garb and told to be a worldling in name as he is in reality, is invited to retain his profession, come to Christ, and be a Christian in reality as he is in name. The gracious invitations of the Gospel are extended even to the hypocrites, the formalists and the pharisees of Sardis and Laodicea.

And unto the angel in the church of Sardis write: Each message is addressed to the minister of the church for which it is intended, in order that he may read it to his congregation. "Angel" means messenger, and ministers are the messengers or ambassadors of Christ.

These things saith He that hath the seven Spirits of God: The language is figurative. Of course it means the one Spirit, the number seven being introduced to indicate the completeness and all-sufficiency of the powers of that Spirit. The seven stars: ministers again (See last lesson).

I know thy works: There is no harshness in the language. It is guilt that gives the sharp edge to the words. These very words, that carry condemnation to the church of Sardis, bring comfort to other churches. The world knows our profession; Christ has more than that to judge by; He knows our works—knows their true character and motive—knows whether or not they spring from living faith.

That thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead: It would seem that the church of Sardis had fallen into formalism, accepted a mere profession as sufficient qualification on the part of its members, and did not insist on their life being conformed to that profession; hence, with the exceptions referred to afterwards, its religion was vain, its works were not works of faith, its labours were not labours of love, it was spiritually dead.

There is no harm in having a name to live; the whole evil is in being dead. We ought to be Christians in name, and we ought to be Christians in reality also. No one can justify himself by saying that he makes no profession. "Consistency is in many cases not much of a jewel." There is no merit in being consistently bad.

Be watchful: a rousing command, difficult to translate without diminution of force—"become watching," or "wake up and watch."

Strengthen the things which remain: There was at least the framework of religion. That was not to be cast aside, but strengthened by faith, prayer, activity, and watchfulness over the membership. Works not perfect: not springing from faith and love—worthless.

Remember how thou hast received and heard: Perhaps the Christians of Sardis had at first received the word

"with joy" (See Parable of the Sower, Luke viii. 13). Hold fast: the truth which you recall to memory. Repent: turn from your sin to God with full purpose of new obedience. I will come on thee: for the infliction of judgment. As a thief: suddenly and without further warning.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, etc. Compare 1 Kings xix. 18. In white: denoting purity—the righteousness of Christ. For they are worthy: not in themselves, but in Christ.

He that overcometh: no matter what he may be now—saint or sinner; hypocrite or open, unabashed evil-doer; inconsistent with a good profession, or consistent with a bad profession—if, by faith in Christ he gains the victory over his sinful nature, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot, etc. The "Westminster Teacher" says, "Christ does not either say or imply here that names once entered in the 'Book of Life' will ever be actually blotted out. It is implied that they will be, if those who wear them do not get the victory over sin. But the very warning may be a part of the means by which the Lord makes the victory sure and the loss impossible."

II. **REAL CHRISTIANITY—PROFESSION AND PRACTICE.**—vers. 7-13. Our lesson, after dealing with the message to one of the worst of the seven churches, now brings before us the message to one of the best. Of the seven, the church of Smyrna and that of Philadelphia only are spoken of with entire approval. To the latter Christ reveals himself as

He that is Holy, He that is true; In claiming absolute holiness, Christ proclaims Himself to be God. King of David: Christ is the promised Messiah—the King that was to occupy the throne of David forever. Openeth and no man shutteth, etc. (See last lesson).

I know thy works: Terrible words to the people of Sardis, but a message of joy to those of Philadelphia. Whoever may mistake motives, Christ cannot do so.

An open door: a prospect of usefulness and extension. Thou hast a little strength: more literally *thou hast little strength*—weak in numbers and resources. The Church is commended, not for being strong, but for making a good use of the little strength it had. Hast kept my word, etc.: proved faithful even in weakness.

Synagogue of Satan: The adversary has his own places of worship and his worshippers in this world. The name specially applies to anti-Christian organizations. Say they are Jews but are not: not of Israel in the spiritual sense, though Jews by birth. Worship before Thy feet: The church would be enabled to wield such an influence that opposers would be compelled to acknowledge that the Lord was with her.

I come quickly: As used here the word does not necessarily mean *soon*, but *suddenly*—without warning.

Crown: the final triumph—the reward of faithfulness (Rev. ii. 10).

Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: Are we Sabbath school scholars, teachers, writers of lessons, etc., to be like the scaffolding or temporary supports of a building in course of erection, destined to be removed before the building is completed; or are we to be pillars that "shall go no more out?" If Noah employed any carpenters to assist himself and his three sons in building the ark, theirs was a peculiarly sad fate.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

This book, with which the canon of the New Testament closes, stands in very striking contrast with all that have gone before it. Its glowing and gorgeous imagery, its symbolic visions of the coming history of the world, are, as far as that volume is concerned, absolutely unique. And yet if the method of education which had been begun under the old covenant was to reach its completion in the new, if men were to have stamped with divine authority what their yearning expectations might otherwise fashion for themselves, it was to be expected *a priori*, that it would not close without embracing that aspect of the truth which took the form of an apocalypse. The later prophets of the Old Testament, Ezekiel and Daniel, in some measure even Isaiah and Jeremiah, had seen such visions, shadowing forth the history of the great kingdoms of the world, and the coming of the Messiah. One whose thoughts had been specially turned to their prophetic writings, to the coming of the Son of man in the clouds of heaven (Dan. 7: 13; Matt. 26: 64), to "the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet" (Dan. 9: 27; Matt. 24: 15), would be led, we may well believe, to desire earnestly that he too might be blest with like manifestations of the divine glory, with like foreshadowings of the future triumphs of the divine kingdom. The pentecostal gift itself was connected with seeing visions and dreaming dreams (Acts 2: 17). St. Peter, his friend and companion, had been taught by a vision the great truth that he was to call no man common or unclean. St. Paul, though he wrote no Book of Revelation, had yet been the recipient of "visions and revelations of the Lord" without number, and had been caught up to the third heaven, and to the paradise of God. . . . It was, if one may so speak, the natural and fitting consummation of these scattered teachings, that one, at least, of the great leaders of the Church should be called to receive and transmit an apocalypse of this nature: and if divine gifts are adapted, according to the wisdom of the Eternal Spirit, to the character and powers of those to whom they are given, we may be bold to say that there was no one on whom this gift was so likely to be bestowed as on the beloved disciple, who had shared the secrets of his Master's heart; who had been able to receive and record the higher teaching, which transcended the power of the earlier evange-

lists. The idealizing mystic temperament which lives in what to others seem abstract terms, light and darkness, life and death, love and wrath, is also that which is most readily led to clothe its thoughts in symbols, and to shadow forth the future, not in the form of an anticipated chronicle of things to come, but in mysterious visions and things hard to be understood. It was fit that the beloved disciple should be taught in the same way as Daniel, the "man greatly beloved," had been of old, and that he whose sense of the love of God and Christ was clearer and deeper than that of most others, should see that love revealed, both in the clear light of unmingled truth, and in the rainbow hues that encircled the everlasting throne. . . .

Yet the chief value of the book practically is, after all, independent of its predictive element. It has enriched the devotion and the poetry of Christendom with the most glowing imagery, with symbols of profoundest meaning. All that is noblest and most beautiful in the writings of Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, in the ritual of Tabernacle and Temple, is brought together by the writer into what has well been called a gorgeous "mosaic" of gems, in which all that was most precious sparkles as with a new radiance. No book in the Bible has so helped to raise the thoughts and imaginations of the poor above their common life, and to make them, more or less, unconscious poets. The hymns of Christendom would lose a large portion of their beauty and their power if we were to strike out from them all that flows directly and indirectly from the Revelation of St. John.—*The Rev. Dr. E. H. Plumptre, in The Bible Educator.*

THE "Baptist Teacher," makes use of the following beautiful and impressive illustrations: "The work of the teacher is not unlike that of the photographer, who employs ten-fold more time to prepare the surface which receives the impression than he takes to secure the impression itself. The impression is the work of a moment. And so with the teacher. A half-hour is allotted in which the impression must be made. Of how much importance, then, is the preparation, when this impression must be made to endure!"

It is a good thing for every teacher to keep a faithful record of every one of his scholars. It is a great satisfaction for a teacher to be able to give one so approximately complete as is the following, which is taken from the private record of a teacher in the St. John's M. E. School, of Newburgh, N. Y., and which was published in the "Sunday School Journal": "I have been a teacher in our school for over twenty-five years. Have taught one hundred and thirty-nine scholars, ninety-one of whom are now Christians, twenty are in the Sunday school work, one in the ministry, four have been called home, and twenty-one have moved away, of whom I can give no account."

CONSUMPTION CURED.

An old physician, retired from practice, having had placed in his hands by an East India missionary the formula of a simple vegetable remedy for the speedy and permanent cure for Consumption, Bronchitis, Catarrh, Asthma, and all Throat and Lung Affections, also a positive and radical cure for Nervous Debility and all Nervous Complaints, after having tested its wonderful curative powers in thousands of cases, has felt it his duty to make it known to his suffering fellows. Actuated by this motive and a desire to relieve human suffering, I will send free of charge to all who desire it, this recipe, in German, French, or English, with full directions for preparing and using. Sent by mail by addressing with stamp, naming this paper, W. W. SHERAR, 149 Powers' Block, Rochester, N. Y.

The Established Church of Scotland received, last year, about \$90,000, with which they sustained sixty-three mission stations, having 1,956 communicants and 7,905 attendance; also ninety mission churches, having 12,295 communicants and 22,000 attendance, and aided in the erection of twenty-two churches with 9,891 sittings.

Official Notices.

MISSIONARY MEETINGS—MIDDLE DISTRICT.—The following arrangements have been made for the annual meetings of the C. C. M. S.:—Whitby, Monday, Dec. 1st; Bowmanville, Tuesday, Dec. 2nd. Deputation: Revs. H. D. Powis and John Burton.—Newmarket, Monday, Dec. 8th; Vespra, Tuesday, Dec. 9th; Bethesda, Wednesday, Dec. 10th; Rugby, Thursday, Dec. 11th. Deputation: Revs. J. I. Hindley, W. H. Wariner and H. D. Hunter.—Georgetown, Monday, Dec. 8th; Acton, Tuesday, Dec. 9th; South Caledon, Wednesday, Dec. 10th; Churchill, Thursday, Dec. 11th. Deputation: Revs. J. B. Silcox, D. McKinnon and J. Unsworth.—Pinegrove, Monday, Dec. 8th; North Erin, Tuesday, Dec. 9th; Bolton, Wednesday, Dec. 10th. Deputation: Revs. Robt. Hay, and E. D. Silcox.—Owen Sound, Sunday, Dec. 14th; (preaching at Wiarton, Sunday 14th); Wiarton, Monday, Dec. 15th; North Derby, Tuesday, Dec. 16th; South Keppel, Wednesday, Dec. 17th; Maxwell, Thursday Dec. 18th. Deputation: Revs. E. D. Silcox and F. Wrigley.—Unionville, Monday, Jan. 13th; Stouffville, Tuesday, Jan. 14th; Manilla, Wednesday, Jan. 15th. Deputation: Revs. H. D. Powis, J. Unsworth and J. Burton. It is earnestly to be hoped that these meetings will be well announced from the pulpit and through the press. This will devolve upon the pastors or deacons. The Deputation are expected to fill their appointment without fail. E. D. SILCOX, Secretary M. D. Stouffville, Jan. 27, 1879.