



LESSON III.—JANUARY 21.

The Preaching of John the Baptist.

Luke III., 1-17. Memory verses 3-6. Read Malachi III., 1-7; IV., 1-6.
May be used as a temperance lesson.

Daily Readings.

M. Promised. Isa. 40: 1-8.
T. Announced. Lk. 1: 57-17.
W. Welcomed. Lk. 1: 57-80.
T. Herald. Mal. 3: 1-6.
F. Minister. Jn. 1: 15-28.
S. Martyr. Mk. 6: 14-29.

Golden Text.

'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.'—Luke III., 4.

Lesson Text.

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene. (2.) Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John, the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. (3.) And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. (4.) As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying: 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make his paths straight. (5.) Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth. (6.) And all flesh shall see the salvation of God. (7.) Then said he to the multitude that came forth to be baptized of him, 'O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8.) Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance, and begin not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. (9.) And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; every tree, therefore, which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. (10.) And the people asked him, saying: 'What shall we do then?' (11.) He answered and said unto them: 'He that hath two coats let him impart unto him that hath none; and him that hath meat let him do likewise.' (12.) Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him: 'Master, what shall we do?' (13.) And he said unto them: 'Exact no more than that which is appointed you.' (14.) And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying: 'And what shall we do?' And he said unto them: 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.' (15.) And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ or not. (16.) John answered, saying unto them all: 'I indeed baptize you with water, but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' (17.) 'Whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and will gather the wheat into his garner, but the chaff he will burn with fire unquenchable.'

Suggestions.

John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah, was a child of promise. His mother was a cousin of the mother of Jesus, and his father, Zacharias was a priest in the temple. Of these godly parents John was born about six months before the birth of our Lord. Away in the desert country, the lad grew up, strong in the Lord, and in the power of purity and abstinence.

Alone with God for nearly thirty years, he had become imbued with God's hatred of sin and sham. When Jehovah sent him out

to stir the world, his lips were opened, and he spoke the word of God with power.

John was sent to prepare the way of the coming King. 'The way for the coming of the kingdom of God was full of obstacles of every kind—the military power of the Romans, which had conquered the world; the throne of the emperor, who was worshipped as God; the crimes and sins entrenched in customs, fashion, wealth, and the very structure of society; the pride, the learning, the prejudices of the whole Jewish nation; all the sins, and evils, and selfishness of the human heart. And still every unregenerate human heart is a wilderness abounding in obstacles to the coming of its king.

Illustration.—The voice comes to us, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord.' (1) Fill up the valleys, the sins of omission—defects of prayer, of faith, of love, of work. (2) Bring down the mountains of pride, sin, selfishness, unbelief, worldliness. (3) Straighten out all crooked places, crooked dealings with others, crooked ways of sin, settle difficulties, confess sins. (4) Smooth the rough places—the harshness of temper and manner, the lack of courtesy, the coldness, the fault-finding, which are the little foxes that spoil the vines, the flies in the precious ointment, the spots in our feasts of charity that mar the beauty of holiness.—Peloubets Notes.

'Generation of Vipers.' Those whose hearts were under the dominion of the devil—'that old serpent' (Rev. xii., 9; Gen. iii., 14; John viii., 44.)

'Who hath warned you?' asks John. These who had thought themselves so righteous, being punctilious in small points of the law, seemed to suddenly discover that following the devices of their own hearts was not leading them on to God's holiness. John's preaching awakened men's consciences. But when convicted of evil, they still thought that their position as children of Abraham would bring them the blessings promised to Abraham, though they were at enmity with the God of Abraham. The promises of blessing are only to those who keep the Covenant. God looks only upon the heart. He is no respecter of persons, high position in Church or State can not make up for lack of real love and loyalty to God. God can as easily make Christians out of stones as out of vipers. The stony heart of unbelief, and the viperous heart of impurity can alike be cleansed and quickened by the precious blood of Jesus.

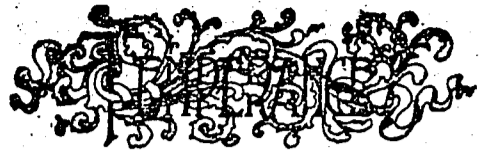
Each class of people who came to John's preaching, and afterwards asked him how they should show their repentance, were faithfully warned, each against his own particular sin. Men are apt to think a great deal more of the sins of their neighbors than of their own particular sins. But God teaches each man to look to his own condition first. When a man is right with God himself, he can safely point out to others their defects, and lead them to the Saviour, who has power to cleanse and keep.

The Jews were beginning to expect the Messiah at about this time, as the prophecies pointed to his coming. Those who heard of John's wonderful preaching began to wonder if this could be the promised Christ. But John quickly told them that he was not the Christ, but only a voice crying in the wilderness (Mark I., 2-8), preparing the way of the Lord. He said: 'I have baptized you with water; but there cometh he that is mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire. (R.V.) The old English version used the phrase, 'the Holy Guest,' for the Spirit of God is to be our guest, abiding in our hearts (John xiv., 17) holding us for God.

Junior C. E. Topic.

Daily Readings.

Mon., Jan. 15.—Through the disciples. Luke 10: 19.
Tues., Jan. 16.—Jerusalem. Acts 2: 41.
Wed., Jan. 17.—In the early church. Acts 14: 27.
Thu., Jan. 18.—Roman Empire. Acts 28: 30-31.
Fri., Jan. 19.—The promise of triumph. John 12: 32.
Sat., Jan. 20.—The reason of success. Matt. 28: 20.
Sun., Jan. 21.—Topic—Some triumphs of missions, Acts 19: 10-20. (A quarterly missionary meeting. Asia).



Opium Catechism.

(By Dr. R. H. McDonald, of San Francisco.)

CHAPTER VII.—MORAL.

1. Q.—What do we learn from studying the opium habit?

A.—That the use of opium as well as that of alcohol or tobacco brings in time its own punishment.

2. Q.—Why are these three poisons so dangerous?

A.—Because they are so deceitful. Each seems to soothe, but it soothes only to destroy, like the snake that charms the bird before it kills it.

3. Q.—Is it as wicked to fall into the tobacco or opium habit as it is to drink alcoholic liquors?

A.—It is wicked for us to take anything that clouds the reason which God has given to us, because we need our reason at all times to keep us from falling into sin.

4. Q.—What can we say of those who transgress the law of God by using these stimulants?

A.—'The way of the transgressor is hard.'

5. Q.—If you were sick and in pain, should you like to take opium?

A.—No; it is better to suffer severe pain than to run the risk of falling into so terrible a habit.

6. Q.—Was there more excuse for taking opium years ago than there is now?

A.—Yes, since chloroform may be given patients during painful operations, there is little excuse for taking opium.

'Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein; and he that rolleth a stone, it will return upon him.'—Proverbs, xxvi., 27.

The Besetting Sin.

(By R. W. Van Schoick, D.D., in 'Michigan Advocate'.)

I have just received a letter from an excellent Christian brother, in which he confesses that, although forgiven of his sins one year ago, which fact he can never doubt, he is yet in much distress of mind because he has not overcome the habit of using tobacco. Ten days after his conversion, while walking before his residence, smoking at the time, he thought these words came to him: 'Can't you do that much for me?' that is, stop smoking. He did not stop, nor has he since for any length of time, in consequence of which he often has seasons of intense unhappiness, and at times is so miserable he has had the thought of suicide.

The number of besetting sins is legion, but to each individual the besetting sin is that which most wars against his soul, and oftentimes trips and throws him in the race for victory. What shall he do with this sin? First of all let him be honest with himself, and admit that it is this sin which is crippling and defeating him. Let him see that this is the sin which doth so easily beset him, and that, by indulgence in it, he is making himself miserable, and losing the crown of success he might otherwise wear. Then, fully seeing and realizing this, let him make it his business to lay the sin aside. I say 'his business,' because it is a mistake to suppose that the Lord is going to do what he commands us to do. Many keep themselves in the way of temptation, and then pray the Lord to deliver them. They dally with their darling sin, thinking they can get free by divine interposition, and awake at last to find themselves bound hand and foot, the slaves of a cruel and tyrannous besetment which has no mercy on them. All the sad lapses in morals have come from this dalliance with the besetting sin. Can one play with fire and not be burned? Can one touch pitch and not be defiled? Can one give the least encouragement to what he knows to be his besetting