



LESSON XII.—JUNE 23.

A New Heaven and a New Earth.

Revelation xxi., 1-7; 22-27. Memory verses, 3, 4, 27. Read Rev. xxi., and xxii.

(May be used as a Temperance Lesson.)

Golden Text.

'He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.'—Rev. xxi., 7.

Lesson Text.

(1) And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. (2) And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. (3) And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. (4) And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. (5) And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. (6) And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. (7) He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. (22) And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. (23) And the city hath no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. (24) And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. (25) And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. (26) And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. (27) And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defleth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Suggestions.

(Condensed from 'Peloubet's Notes.')

The Heavenly City.—Vs. 1-3. I. And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The word here translated new means merely renovated. There could be no heavenly joy with this old earth unchanged, but there are more ways than one of making it new. Take sin out of it, and it would be new enough with no further transformation. Give us new eyes, free from the clogs of earthliness, and there would straightway be new heavens, though every constellation remained what it now is.

The Temperance Lesson.—How it would renew the earth simply to abolish the use of strong drink! The saloon fills most jails, almshouses, and asylums, and is responsible for more poverty than all other causes put together.

For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away.—Astronomy and geology have come to prove, literally, what was revealed to John supernaturally. They show us that everything in this apparently solid universe is flowing and transient. The earth's inner fires will die and the oceans will sink downward as the earth cools, leav-

ing a cracked, lifeless globe like the moon. The sun will lose its heat and light, as thousands of suns have already. The 'fixed stars' are not fixed, but are dashing through space at giddy velocities. The heavens and earth are passing away. And there was no more sea.—'We cannot be sure that this is to be taken literally; we hear of a river in the next chapter, and a perennial stream implies an abundant reservoir of water somewhere.'—Simcox. 'This is no geography lesson.'—Gibson. Of course, it is a symbol. Lovers of the sea's beauty and grandeur, the charm of its everchanging aspects, may be sure that they will not be absent from the next world. But what did the sea mean to John? It signified persecution and fear and dread, loneliness and sorrow and isolation. To all men it signifies separation, storms, drowning, constant change. These shall be no more. Not that they are to exist and we be kept out of them, but they are to be abolished forever. Daniel in his vision, as John in his, saw the great beast, signifying the fierce, determined, persecuting wickedness of the world, rise out of the sea. 'There shall be no more such sea.'—Cowles.

And there shall be no more death.—This means not merely that no more shall die, but that death itself will be dead. Think how much on earth is cut short by death, how many tears and sorrows it causes; and in heaven what plans we can form, what leisureliness will be there, what time for achievement! And spiritual death, which is a far worse hindrance to work than physical death—that also will be gone.

Neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain.—It is easy to see why the least sin must be shut out from heaven; pain would enter with it. Pain is needed in this world to show us the evil of sin, to arouse our sympathy with others, to test and strengthen our characters, to force us to progress. None of these needs exist in heaven.

And he said unto me, It is done.—'Ages of agony to make man new! only a word to make all things new!'—F. Munro Gibson, D.D. 'It is finished,' cried our Saviour on the cross. That was the beginning of the new heaven and earth; this is the completion. Does it mean that in heaven there is to be no more progress? Surely not. Then only will the first essentials of lasting progress be realized. Christ's 'It is finished' proved the beginning of the best progress the world had known; will this 'It is done.' Builders estimate that for a great modern office building at least half of the time of building will be spent in getting a good foundation. That is what will be done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. It is a living, loving Person who is the beginning and the end; the universe does not come up against a blank, dead wall. Such a beginning is assurance of all noble endings; such an end is the beginning of all joy and triumph. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely. What is the water of life? All that makes life worth living. Why is it called a fountain? Because it is constantly filling itself. Who will give it? Christ, and nothing else and no one else; not wealth nor knowledge nor power nor beauty; not Socrates nor Plato nor Shakespeare nor Emerson. To whom will he give it? (1) To those that go to the fountain: you cannot drink at a distance. (2) To those that are thirsty. 'You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink.' It would not be possible to widen the invitation. On what terms is it given? (1) At no cost to us: 'without money and without price.' Indeed, what have we to pay with? (2) But at great cost to the giver. 'Jesus paid it all.' Christ never gives spiritual life automatically, unconsciously. Even in giving physical health he 'perceived that power had gone forth.' (Mark v., 30.)

The Temperance Lesson.—Alcoholic drinks, sometimes called aqua vitae, 'water of life,' are really the wine of death. Whatever the true water of life can do to bless, the opposites of these things strong drink does to curse.

He that overcometh shall inherit all things ('these things,' in the R. V.—the new heavens and earth just created). This

saying 'carries our thoughts to the promises at the beginning of the book (ii., 7, etc.). There is perhaps some significance in the Father thus taking up and repeating the language of the Son.'—Simcox. The thirst and the overcoming seem to belong together. Our desire for heavenly things will lead us to overcome the desire for earthly things and all kinds of earthly hindrances. Nevertheless, though we overcome a few things, we do not earn all things: we inherit them. All is of God's grace.

The Temperance Lesson.—He that overcometh has in it hope even for the drunkard, who has more than most of us to overcome—a temptation so subtle and masterful that it has conquered the clearest heads and strongest wills. But heaven is made up of men who have had to struggle, and the history of every gospel mission proves that Christ can destroy the terrible desire for liquor, even when the 'gold cure' fails.

And I will be his God, and he shall be my son.—To say that we shall be God's sons is the same thing as saying that we shall inherit all things. If a king were your father, you would not worry about your bread and butter. 'But,' it may be asked, 'is not God the God of the sinner also?' Certainly, but with what a difference! To one man the atmosphere is a zephyr, and to another a terrible cyclone; yet it is the same atmosphere.

Christ the light of the world.—I. He is the light of hope for sinners. He is the Sun of Righteousness, with healing in his wings for them.

2. He is the light for all dark lives. Christianity has let the sunlight into the black dungeon of the prisoner. It has destroyed slavery. It has founded innumerable hospitals for the sick, and asylums for the poor.

3. He is the light of knowledge. Science flourishes alone in Christian lands. Public schools are an outgrowth of Christianity. If it were not for Christ, the world would still be in the dark ages.

4. He is the light of political freedom, for free government exists only in Christian lands.

5. He is the torch of civilization, the herald of commerce, binding the world together with a brotherly exchange of products.

6. He is the light of missions, penetrating all dark continents, and bringing them freely all the blessings of the most favored countries.

And the nations ('of them which are saved' omitted from the R. V.) shall walk in the light of it. John did not see merely one great city, but a wide, beautiful world, with the new Jerusalem for its capital. And the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it. We are all 'kings and priests unto God'; this promise is for us as well as for those that wear a crown. For humanity has a glory, it seems, in heaven as well as on earth. 'No one, indeed, was ever a righteous ruler of himself or of others without gaining some glory to contribute to heaven. What an incentive, to think that our true living can help to illuminate the Celestial City!

And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day.—The gates of an ancient city were shut to keep out what was harmful, robbers and enemies in war, but heaven has no such need. 'Thieves do not break through and steal' there, and war will be ended. For there shall be no night there. Remember, John is speaking in the language of symbols. We are not to understand that heaven will be without the beauty of the night, the splendor of stars, the soft curtain of darkness, the loveliness of the moonlight, or what will answer to these charms. But there will be none of the terrors of our nights, the fears of unseen dangers, the increased sickness and death. And in heaven, too, there will not be the worst night of all, the night of the soul. 'The tombstone of a sweet girl blind from her birth, bears this inscription, "There is no night there."'—Biblical Museum.

And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it.—There is, then, an earthly glory that is recognized in heaven, but it will be very different from the glory commonly recognized on earth. The glory