

INTERNATIONAL S. S. LESSON.

Sunday, March 6.

(Specially prepared for the Christian 'Helper' by Mrs. J. C. Wade.)

WITNESS OF JESUS TO JOHN Luke 7:18-28.

**GOLDEN TEXT.** John 5:35. He was a bright and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in His light.

Command—26 28.

INTRODUCTION AND CONNECTIONS.

Several things of importance are recorded by Luke between our last lesson and the present one—such as the call of Levi, or Matthew, (Matt. 9:9-13), the formal setting apart of the twelve Apostles; a portion of that "Sermon" of which Matthew has given us so much, (Chs. 5-7.)—besides much other important matter. But it is not likely that all are related in the precise order of their occurrence; hence it is difficult to determine the exact time that intervened. At the opening of this chapter, we find Jesus again at Capernaum, where He healed the Centurion's servant; and, the following day, at Nain, a small village some twelve miles southwest of Capernaum, where He raised from the dead the widow's son. The account of these miracles was carried by some of His disciples to John, who had been for several months in prison. These wonderful things led John to take a step which, probably, he had contemplated for some time, but never before had had courage to take.

LESSON NOTES.

(19.) And John, calling two of his disciples—two certain disciples—probably two specially trusted ones—sent them to Jesus, saying, art thou he, &c., &c. These questions plainly indicate the state of mind into which John's imprisonment, the interruption of his work, and the disappointment he must have felt, had involved him.

Many are unwilling to suppose that John had become doubtful as to Jesus really being the Christ; and to suppose that it was in order to convince his disciples, that he sent. This opinion is not confirmed by the narrative. John sent the message in his own name, and the answer was returned to John. It is easy to understand how John, who, like other Jews, had, doubtless, occupied his mind mainly with the national hopes that clustered around the Messiah, seeing Jesus making no move towards establishing a temporal kingdom, occupying himself only as a religious teacher and healer, he himself, shut out from what had seemed his life-work, and Jesus making no effort to deliver him from imprisonment and probable death, should, in his loneliness and disappointment, seriously question whether there might not be some mistake; and this great teacher and healer be, after all, like himself, only a forerunner, or messenger of another yet to come. Others see in John's message an element of impatience, amounting almost to fault-finding in view of his own position and danger. This may be true; yet the evidence of John's doubt remains still in the question he asked, and is confirmed by the message Jesus returned.

(20.) They said—John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, &c. John's message was carefully delivered, but as Jesus' rule was to prove His Messiahship by His works, rather than by His own testimony, (John 5:36,) he gave them the opportunity of first witnessing some of them, and then gave them the answer they should return to John.

(21-22.) In that same hour—that is, while John's messengers were waiting—He cured many infirmities, of plagues, of evil spirits, of blindness. Such were the things they had seen, and could personally testify to. Of some others, of some others, of which they had only heard, they now received Jesus' own testimony in confirmation. And now comes the message: Go and tell John what you have seen, and heard. Tell him the blind see; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear. These were the outward, or sensible proofs of Jesus' Messiahship. But there remained the moral evidence which John, of all men then living, was best able to understand and appreciate,—to the poor the gospel is preached. Who, but those commissioned by God, had ever cared for the poor?—had ever attempted to raise them?—to teach them the good news of salvation? Was not this the special thing in the prophets' testimony to Christ, (Is. 61:1-3.) with which John must be familiar?

(23.) And (tell him that) blessed is he

whoever shall not be offended, &c. The word offend means here to stumble; i. e. into a false estimate or opinion. This is clearly a rebuke, yet such a rebuke, in its patient tenderness, as none but Christ could give (compare John 20:29)

(24.) And when the messengers were departed—not before—He began to speak. It was not best John should know the Lord's opinion of him. He would know afterwards, in His "Well done, good and faithful servant," it was best for John that, for the time being, both faith and patience should be having their perfect work. But Jesus must speak of John to those who had been standing near; lest, from the peculiarity of his language, and his withholding any expression of personal interest in him, they should infer that He under-estimated him. What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? Jesus' meaning is obvious. If so, you greatly mistook! Unlike the reed, weak and bending, before every breath of wind, John is strong in faith; unbending in loyalty to God and truth; always firm, upright, steadfast.

(25.) Went ye out to see a man clothed in soft raiment? If so, how greatly again you mistook! Behold, they who are gorgeously apparelled and live delicately are in kings' courts: not in the desert, clothed in camels' hair, and feeding upon locusts and wild honey.

(26.) But went ye out to see a prophet? If so, thine was no mistake. A prophet? Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet! How more than a prophet?

(27.) This is He of whom it is written, &c. He is not only a prophet, but was himself the burden of prophecy.—Behold! send My messenger before thy face, to prepare thy way before thee! No other prophet had such a work to do as that.

(28.) I say unto you A pointed and emphatic form of assertion—among those that are born of women there is not (there hath not risen, Matt. 11:11.) a greater prophet than John the Baptist. This is not saying John was the greatest man that had ever lived; nor yet that he was the greatest prophet. The comparison is between John and other prophets; and simply is that (as a prophet) there has been none greater. But he that is least in the Kingdom of God is greater than he. By the Kingdom of God, is meant, the Spiritual Church of the new dispensation. The comparison here is between prophets, even the greatest, under the old dispensation, and Christians, even the least, under the new. But how is such an one greater? He is greater in privilege (Heb. 11:40); in knowledge (Rom. 16:25, 26); in experience (Heb. 8:10), than John who, in all these respects, was on the same footing as the old prophets (1 Pet. 10:12), but yet under the old dispensation.

SUGGESTED THOUGHTS.

John, under severe trials, gave way to doubts concerning that of which he had once had the clearest evidence, (John 1:34). In this respect he does not stand alone. Every Christian has experienced a similar, if not far less excusable, darkening of mind through unbelief.

Jesus knows our frame, and remembers that we are dust—witness His patient and tender dealing with John. He first demonstrates His Messiahship to him, and then, with a gentle rebuke, leaves him to infer from the proof he had given, that, notwithstanding seeming difficulties, all must and would be well.

Jesus was very tender of His servant's character. Leaving John to finish his course by faith and not by sight, and win his martyr-crown by an unjust and shameful death, He left, in few words, a testimonial to him which covers his name with imperishable glory.

No earthly monument, however great or glorious, could compare with that brief testimony of Jesus to the worth of John.

QUESTION SUMMARY.

(For the Children).

(19.) Where was John at this time? Whom did he send to Jesus? What were they to ask? What did he mean by that? Why did John ask that, after saying what he did in John 1:34? Because he had grown low-spirited and very unhappy in prison, and he began to wonder if, after all, he might not have been mistaken. (20.) What did the men say when they came to Jesus? (21.) Did Jesus answer them just then? Why not? Because He wanted to give them some proofs that He was the Son of God. What proofs did He give? How did they prove that He was the Son of God? Because, no one but God could do such things. (22.) What then did He bid them tell John? (23.) What more

were they to tell him? What is meant by shall not be offended in me? See note. Had John been offended in Jesus in that way? Was not that a very noble reproval?

(24.) What did Jesus do when they were gone? What two questions did he ask? Was John like a reed? No, a reed is weak, and bends easily. John was strong, and bold, and true. (25.) What does Jesus ask here? Had John ever lived in kings' courts? Where had he lived? Luke 1:30. What did he eat and wear? (Matt. 3:4.) (26-28.) What more did Jesus say about John? What was John more than a mere prophet? He was the Lord's messenger, or herald. Who said what you find in v. 27? Do you think, from v. 28, that John was the greatest man that ever lived? No, but there had been no greater prophet. Who may be greater than even John? He who understands and believes what the New Testament tells about Jesus. Then will you not make haste to understand and believe what it tells you about Jesus? Can any one truly believe in Jesus and not love and obey Him? No, that is quite impossible.

THE INTRODUCTION AND USE OF OPIUM IN CHINA.

By G. W. CLARKE, MISSIONARY AT KWIO-YANG LU.

The first introduction of opium into China seems to be shrouded in mystery. Some Chinese medical works speak of its use as early as A. D. 732. It seems to have been cultivated in Tong cheu-Pu-Fu, (close to Bunnah), but has met with considerable opposition from the authorities from time to time, for about the year 1820 the people had to grow it secretly: its cultivation is now carried on very extensively in a number of districts, and the yield is abundant.

So extensively is this article grown that in some parts it forms the staple crop, little or no grain being produced.

Opium was introduced from Canton between the years of A. D. 1796 and 1821; smuggling was also extensively carried on; it was then worth its weight in gold.

It was packed in boxes enveloped in silver, and duty was paid on the whole as silver, smoking at this time was carried on secretly with closed doors, and spies were sent to find them out, and those captured, were, by the chief Mandarin, branded on the mouth. In the year 1868 a fourth grade military Mandarin forbade his troops using it, and those who disobeyed were punished by having a piece cut off the upper lip. In 1873 a tax of \$4 cash per day was levied on the smoking dens, and had the effect of closing many of them. As this tax was afterwards removed, smoking went on as usual again. In the year 1875 the Governor exhorted the people to discontinue the practice, and gave recipes for those who wished to give it up.

The cultivation is now so extensive that the imported Indian article seems likely to be driven entirely out of the market. In the year 1820 opium was sold at £5 per ounce, this year (1880) it is worth 7½ d. only.

The revenue at present derived from its importation is about £30,000 per annum. There are a lot of dirty, ragged, miserable looking men going about the streets, crying "Dregs, Dregs." These dregs are formed from the straining of the opium, and the common paper is used as the filter; this dirty mass is boiled down, and the extract sold at three-pence an ounce. This is used by the very poorest classes, and produces no craving.

Its use has now become so fashionable that one is not considered respectable unless he smokes. The proportion of smokers to non-smokers in the whole population is about seven tenths of the men, and two tenths of the women. It is rather curious to notice the implements used by these smokers, the cheapest pipe can be purchased for 1½ d., this carried in a dirty, oily, blue calico bag on the shoulder, marks the slave to this vice. The sale of this article is not confined to the storekeeper only, as vendors of the same walk the streets. High prices are

often paid for pipes of superior quality, ranging from five shillings to £25, many being ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones.

Boys often begin to smoke at ten years of age. I know of one lad who used to join his father in this practice, also a girl of eleven who used it for three years. Her father was most anxious for her to give it up, as she was engaged to be married, her intended declined to have her unless she gave it up, and, as husbands buy their wives for cash, it can be readily surmised what caused the father's anxiety.

The action of this drug on the system seems to be that of a narcotic. Old smokers seem to live in a state of stupid indifference, the brain being in a torpid condition. It is very difficult to make these people realize the terrible results of following this practice, therefore it is not surprising to find so few are anxious to give it up. I have been using my influence among the people, and having been supplied with medicine from a friend, I put out notices to the effect that I would cure of the habit, those who desired it, free of charge, upon payment of a small deposit, which would be returned when a cure was effected, only seven persons applied during the first twenty days, two of whom were cured, two gave up the treatment, and three are on trial.

There are very few who really wish to discontinue its use; many speak like orators against it, yet they would require a bonus to forsake it. Sometimes we find cases who are able to give up the habit of their own will. It often stands in the way of preferment to office, can frequently office-seekers generally relinquish the habit when they find it to their interest to do so.

A missionary writing from the capital of Yunnan says, "We passed through a very poor country, and were grieved to see how the people were under the opium curse. Nearly every one smokes; their wretched appearance tells you this, you have no occasion to ask."

Yellow, shrivelled faces, with filthy ragged clothes, unclean bodies, miserable dwellings, poor food, all tell the same tale.

They listen to the Gospel with stupid indifference, for I believe their minds as well as their bodies are being ruined.

What about their souls? Oh! it is awful to stand surrounded by a group of these miserable objects, it is fearfully depressing as one feels that then, case, humanly speaking, is so hopeless.

I would ask that Christians continually pray about this matter, that our Lord will have mercy upon the guilty and afflicted.

THE BIBLE is the great study of the day. If we want to meet the scepticism of the future we must meet it by teaching our young people the doctrine of God's Word. An acquaintance with God's Word is necessary to repulse the enemy of souls, and those who oppose the truth. We must interest young people by taking them while young, and filling them with the stories of the Bible. If we want to interest others we must have an interest in the work ourselves; if we wish to fire the souls of others we must have in our heart the love of God and a high idea of the work. A living interest on the part of parents is highly necessary to this. Rev. Robt. Gray, at York Township S. S. Association.

A touching incident is related of a negro in Eastern Africa who was seen with an old coat, mouldy and moth-eaten, over his shoulders, which he had kept for ten years in memory of the giver. He described him as "a white man who treated black men as his brothers, whose words were always gentle, and whose manners were always kind, whom as a leader it was a privilege to follow, and who knew the way to the hearts of all men." The giver was undoubtedly Dr Livingstone.