

SABBATH SCHOOL TEACHER.

INTERNATIONAL LESSONS

LESSON II.

Jan. 23.
1884.

HEARING AND DOING.

{ James 1.
5: 17.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only."—James 1: 22.

TIME. Soon after last lesson, but some writers assign a later date—about A.D. 61.

WRITER.—Commentators are divided as to the identity of this James. It was *not* the brother of John who was killed by Herod some years before the Council at Jerusalem, but there are other two Jameses mentioned in the Gospels and Acts: (1) James, the son of Alphaeus, Mark 3: 18; Matt. 10: 3; Luke 6: 15; Acts 1: 13, 14; and (2) James "the brother of the Lord," Matt. 13: 55; Mark 6: 3; Gal. 1: 19. The question is, are these two identical, or are they distinct? We cannot go into the question further than to say that very eminent theologians are found favouring each view, and that each opinion has its probabilities and difficulties. I am inclined to take the last opinion, but as it is of no practical consequence to our lesson the subject need not be further enlarged upon. We believe that the writer, whoever he was, spoke as he was moved by the Holy Ghost. That is sufficient for us.

Notes and Comments.—Ver. 16. "Do not err,"—Rev. "Be not deceived." Ver. 13 tells us what the error was—supposing God was the author of temptation, whereas he does not tempt, nor can he be tempted.

Ver. 17. So far is such a thought from being true, that all that is good on earth, "every good gift and every perfect gift," comes from God. "Father of lights:" as the creator, originator of the heavenly bodies. (Job 38: 28. Gen. 4: 20, 21). Reference to changes in the heavenly bodies follows, naturally, also Father of spiritual lights, and so there can be no darkness in Him or from Him. (1 John 1: 5.) "Shadow of turning:" lit. the shadow mark cast by the heavenly bodies in their turning or revolution, an eclipse. There is no change in God, he is eternally the same.

Ver. 18. "Of his own will:" this is one proof of the goodness of God—comp. John 1: 13. "Begat" the change which the Spirit of God creates in the hearts of men, is like a new creation. "Word of truth:" preached gospel, God's instrument in the conversion of men. "First-fruits:" under the old dispensation the first-fruits were consecrated to God. James is writing to Jews who would understand the allusion. He wishes to inculcate holiness, so he tells them that their position is that of the consecrated sheaves, they are the first-fruits in the great harvest of salvation, and should pre-eminently be the Lord's.

Ver. 19. "Swift to hear:" that is the word of truth, its vast importance demands instant attention. It is contrasted with the next clause, "Slow to speak:" that is with assumption of authority, be modest, slow to speak unwise things of God, as in ver. 13. This is further spoken of in ver. 26, and throughout the next chapter. "Slow to wrath:" see chap. 3: 13, 14; and chap. 4: 5. Wrath, as a rule, implies sin, although there may be a righteous wrath, only we must be slow even to that.

Ver. 20. A special reason why we should abstain from wrath. "Worketh not:" is not served by, rather it hinders the work of God's righteousness. We are told that it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing. Yes, but not with anger; the heated, angry advocacy of the truth by some men does more harm than good. Wrath will not make him that indulges in it righteous, neither others. }

Ver. 21. "Filthiness," or defilement which is washed away by the word of Christ. (John 15: 3.) "Superfluity," rather, as in Rev., "overflowing of wickedness." Sin is not merely an evil in the hearts and lives of men, but it is an abounding evil. "Meekness:" the opposite of wrath in ver. 20, it includes a child-like, humble, as well as an uncontentious spirit, Christ-like. (Matt. 11: 29.) "Engrafted:" Rev. "Implanted." the allusion is, perhaps, to the parable of the sower, and it is the implanted, or sown; word which, received into the soul, is to spring up a plant of righteousness. "Able to save:" mighty power of the incorrupted seed. (1 Pet. 1: 23.)

Ver. 22. "Doers:" *Alford* says, "not only do, but be doers." It carries an enduring, a sort of official force with it; "let this be your occupation." "Deceiving," as alas many do in this very fashion—so did some of old. (Rom. 2: 13.)

Ver. 23, 24. The writer now gives an illustration. A man beholds his face in a glass, so the hearer beholds his natural moral face in God's Word. "Glass:" Rev. "mirror." these in ancient times were generally made of polished plates of metal; he contemplates himself, then strain, "way forgets," or, as has been said, if it were possible for a man to go down the street and meet himself, he would not recognize by his memory of the likeness; so, after hearing the truth, and coming in some degree to a knowledge of himself, the man turns away to the world and worldly things, and forgets all that he has heard of his own sinfulness; but forgetfulness is no excuse.

Ver. 25. "Whoso looketh:" the word means more than simply looking. It implies a search after something hidden, looking beneath the surface. "Perfect law of liberty:" the Gospel of Christ, it is God's law to us, but it is freedom. "Perfect:" as distinguished from the Jewish law, which was imperfect. (See Matt. 5: 21-48.) "Continued:" does not go away as in preceding verses. Omit "therein," it is supplied by the translators and spoils the sense. "Blessed in his Father," "Doing," that is the correct idea, the fulfilling of the Word of God brings blessedness with it. A life of obedience is a life of blessedness. (Psa. 19: 11.)

Ver. 26. The idea of ver. 19, 20, repeated with emphasis. "Seemeth," makes an external profession of religion. "Bridleth:" a metaphor he uses again (ch. 3: 3-5); a

very fitting word, how many are the sins of the tongue "Deceiveth:" by thinking that he is religious, when he is only a formalist. So all religious forms are vain, unless they influence a man's speech and actions.

Ver. 27. "Pure religion:" that is the outward manifestation of it. "Before God:" such as he approves, that religion is pure which has in it no admixture of self-deceit or hypocrisy. "Is this:" or results in this. "Fatherless, widows," the most needy generally, named as types of all who should be helped. "Unspotted:" God's people dwell in a world of pollution and are constantly liable to be soiled by it; hence the admonition. They must keep themselves from it by the help of God. (1 Tim. 6: 14.)

HINTS TO TEACHERS.

Prefatory.—A few words to your class about this epistle may not be amiss; it has been much misunderstood, considered as setting forth salvation by works, instead of by grace through faith, and as a consequence some as Luther, would go so far as to expunge it from the Scriptures. This arises from an imperfect understanding of the object of the writer; he was writing to the Jews who had embraced Christianity, too many of them as it would appear, looking upon it as a mere modification of Judaism, and that obedience to forms and ceremonies was all that was needed. James would show these that Christianity was a *life*, something more than correct opinions or exact observances, and that those who had faith would manifest it by their works. Taking that as the key, and remembering that James uses the words "faith and works" in a different sense to Paul, it is easy to see that James is not only not opposed to Paul, but is his complement; the two writers show us the Christian character, rounded and complete.

Topical Analysis.—(1) God not the author of evil, but the source of all good (vs. 16-18) (2) The manifestation of the religion of the heart (vs. 19-27). On the first topic we may show what an anchor of the soul this truth is; we are surrounded by sin in the world, by confusion and error, but this is not from God. God made things good (Gen. 1: 10, 13, 18, 21, 23, 31), everything fitted for its purpose, everything to bring happiness to His creatures. Not only were they good in themselves, but the end for which they were made was good; it is man that has perverted and turned to evil. The tongue, to which James more especially refers, was made to give forth words of truth and blessing; it is man that has made it a fountain of anger, bitterness, wrath and lying; and especially should we think of this in connection with the work of salvation. It was God's love that gave us the good news of a Saviour; "God so loved the world." Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us; and so on, again and again, God's purposes from eternity have been good for man, and not evil. And God is unchangeable; no variableness, the same yesterday, to-day and forever. Show how His promises have all been "yea and amen" to His people, and impress deeply the lesson that "this God is our God for ever and ever."

On the Second Topic teach the great truth that a change of heart must bring a change of life; you can get your scholars to tell you that if a drunken, swearing man, becomes a Christian, he will leave off his bad habits; then dwell upon the "why"—not alone because it would be inconsistent with his new profession, but because his heart, the fountain of his desires, thoughts, actions, is changed,—he cannot willingly do as he has done before. (1 John 3: 9.) A Christian may be betrayed into hasty words, into wrong acts, but they are opposed to his new nature, and he cannot continue in what is wrong. Show that the life is the fruit, that as a tree is known by its fruits, so the heart is known by the life. It would be well to read in connection with this lesson the first Epistle of John; it is full of confirmatory truth, some of which you may quote to your scholars. Let, however, the opposite truth be insisted on, that there must be a change of heart if the life is to be acceptable to God.

Truths and Teachings.—Gratitude—the recognition of God's mercies should draw our souls to love Him.

Our righteousness should follow the pattern of the righteousness of God.

If a man rests in hearing the Word, he is self-deceived.

God is good, and only good comes from Him.

God in Christ, "the same yesterday, to-day and for ever."

Unhallowed ways of working for God do not help His cause.

God's service is a law, but a law of liberty.

Main Lessons.—Service, which is form only, is not acceptable to God Prov. 30: 12, 13, in connection with Isa. 28: 17-20; Isa. 1: 11-15; Matt. 5: 20.

But service from the heart, however weak, will be accepted Matt. 10: 42; Mark 12: 41-44; Mark 14: 16-18.

SELF-EXAMINATION.

Says Paul to the Corinthians. "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith, prove your own selves." And from the tendencies of your natures, together with the influences of the world upon us, it is sufficiently evident that the same word of counsel comes not amiss to us to-day. We do need at times, more or less frequent, to examine and prove our own selves, whether our Christian lives be genuine and true, or have degenerated into a mere formal profession of religion.

How shall this self-testing be done? The first impulse with many people is simply to turn attention within, and look upon present feeling, inquiring of themselves somewhat after this fashion: "Do I feel that I love God with all my heart? Have I strong faith in His promises? Are there joy and peace in my soul? Is my spirit cheered by bright hopes for

the future life? And if there does not come back a quick and hearty response in the affirmative, but sluggishness and indifference seems to be found, then doubt and discouragement ensue and fears of having fallen from grace are entertained. Now while a careful and intelligent self-examination with reference to the emotions, desires, and purposes is to be commended, such as the foregoing are unreliable, deceptive, bad.

Jesus proposes a better way. He says: "If ye love me keep my commandments." It is along this line of obedience to His commandments, faithful compliance with the revealed will of God, that the surest test is to be made. Let the enquiring one, then, instead of interviewing his present feelings, reflect upon his life, asking: "Does my conduct show that I have no other gods before Him no god of gain, nor of fashion, nor of pleasure? Does it show that I reverence His name and carefully keep His Sabbath? Does it give evidence that I neither covet or steal? (Every one who ever buys or sells, or trades, ought constantly to keep this question before him.) Does it show that I love my neighbour as myself, and God far above all?" Examine yourself, O reader, by this test. Let all the Church do the same, and a better day will quickly dawn.—*Christian Advocate*.

OUR STANDARD OF PERSONAL HOLINESS.

The Word of God teaches that there is no degree of holiness to which any one may not attain under the renewing and sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit. But how many are there who have no aspirations to become what are called "eminent saints"; who not only seem to be, but are content with being only fair "average Christians," and do not even *hope* for more than this! Their only desire or hope is to have sufficient faith and grace to secure them an entrance into heaven. Beyond this they do not seek to advance in sanctification. Ask the question of one of these halting professors (is it safe to say believers?), and probably the reply will be: "I never expect to do more than reach a very humble place in the kingdom of Christ. I am not worthy of, and have no ambition for extraordinary saintship." Thus they solve and delude themselves with the snare of "a voluntary humility" under which they cloke their slothfulness and unbelief. This is a grievous evil in all our churches—the low standard of piety which the Christian sets for himself, and which the Church too often countenances. Of one thing we may be sure, that we will not attain to any higher degree of holiness than our standard demands of us, but it is quite certain that we will fall much below it. How important then that our standard be a high one, so high that nothing less than the infinite power of the Spirit of God can ever bring us the victory. Thanks be unto His holy name that He has promised to give freely of His Spirit to all who ask. And God is not slack in His promises. He is as true and faithful to His word now as He was to Abraham, to Moses, to Elijah, to David, to Paul, to Peter, to John, and to all His saints in all ages of the Church. None of these had, by nature, any special fitness for becoming great saints more than the humblest believer now. It was the same Spirit which is so freely offered to us that enable them to "press forward toward the mark for the prize of their high calling."—*Central Presbyterian*.

DRIVING WITH OIL.

Another homely illustration. I wanted to drive an iron bar through a piece of timber. I bored a hole of the right size, but the bar was rusty, and the hole was rough. I made slow progress, and was beginning to split the wood. Then I thought of the oil can. I oiled the bar; I poured oil into the hole, and a few blows of the hammer sent the iron into its place. The oil had not diminished the size of the bar, or enlarged that of the hole. It had only relieved the friction. It had smoothed both surfaces. A few drops of oil were more effective than many blows of the hammer. How slow some good people are to learn this simple lesson. They take hold of an important enterprise with great zeal. They are intensely earnest, and even morbidly conscientious. Everybody ought to see it just as they do, and who does not is hammered at without mercy. Such a charitable zeal provokes opposition. It excites all the friction of the natural heart. Men will not appreciate the truth presented, when they are repelled by the spirit in which it is presented. Let the reformer be careful to have plenty of oil. Let him speak the truth in love.—*Dr. Bubbs*.