

SKETCH OF LESSON.

4TH SUNDAY IN ADVENT. DECEMBER 22ND, 1889.

The First Christmas Day.

Passage to be read.—St. Luke ii. 6-17.

If you were at Jerusalem, you might take a beautiful walk over the hills towards the south, and six miles off you would come to a pretty little town, standing on one of the hills, and having a wide view eastward over the wilderness of Judaea. This is Bethlehem. It is now full of people. The Emperor of Rome is taking a census of his subjects, and people have to go and be numbered at the place where their forefathers lived. Thither came a man and woman who have journeyed all the way from Galilee to be registered here. Why? (v. 4). And now there is no room for them, except where the horses and asses are put—dark, crowded, noisy, uncomfortable. And there in the night is born a little baby. There is no cradle for it, and the mother has to put it in a manger.

I.—THE SAVIOUR'S BIRTH (vv. 6, 7).

1. Known only to few. Joseph and Mary knew it. How did they know? Who told them? (S. Luke i. 30, 33). But no one else on earth. The angels knew it. 2. There was no place ready for Him. "No room." The King of kings, the Saviour of the world came to the earth and the earth was not prepared to receive him.

II.—THE ANGEL'S GOOD NEWS. (vv. 8-14).

1. They knew it would bring 'Glory to God'—by showing his power, wisdom, love (Ps. lxxxv. 10; 1 Cor. i. 24; 1 S. John iv. 9)—so rejoiced. 2. 'Peace on earth'—peace between men and God (Rom. v. 1)—peace in men's hearts (Phil. iv. 7)—peace among men (Eph. iv. 32). They longed to see peace everywhere—so rejoiced. 3. 'Good will to Men.' Had God ever had a bad will to men? See Ezek. xxxiii. 11. But now God's love would be seen and felt (1 S. John iv. 9) Rom. v. 8)—so they rejoiced.

III.—THE SHEPHERD'S DELIGHT. (vv. 15-17).

It is night in the fields near Bethlehem. Here are men not gone home (1 Sam. xvii. 34; S. John x. 10, 12). Suddenly—a dazzling light—what? 'the glory of the Lord'—brighter even than the sun (Acts xxvi. 13). No wonder they are sore afraid! How gently God's angel speaks! 'Good tidings'—for them ('to you'). Was it there for them? 'A Saviour.' And who is He? 'Christ'—the Messiah, promised of old, come at last; He is 'the Lord' not a mere man—not even an angel—not a subject at all—but 'the Lord of all.' And then they hear that song. They will go and worship him at once. Then see what they did—(1) praised God; (2) told others. What an example!

FROM A RAINDROP TO A GEYSER.—the wonders of water in various forms,—is the subject of an article which the great English scientist, Professor Tyndall, has written for the coming volume of the *Youth's Companion*. Popular scientific articles will also be contributed by Professor N. S. Shaler, Professor John Trowbridge, Sir Morell Mackenzie, Dr. William A. Hammond, Lieutenant Schwatka and Dr. St. John Roosa.

A PLEA FOR SHORT SERMONS.

The following letter appeared in Saturday's *Times* bearing the signature "Rustic Moralist." We have been given to understand the parish referred to is situated in the county of Dorset:—

I should not venture to trouble you with this letter, except that I am convinced that one of the many reasons why *The Times* has retained its popularity and influence through so many changes, is the facility with which you have thrown your columns open to the public and permitted them to become their own advocates and to air their own grievances. For many years past a very large portion of your space has been devoted to the wants and the troubles of Ireland. No doubt the Irish are a very interesting people, but the English people are as interesting as the sister nation, and have their own grievances, which require redress, although we have shot no landlords and murdered only a very few policemen. Fairness therefore requires that you should devote some of your space to the troubles of a half urban, half rural parish in the south of England. I am free to confess that we are not oppressed by our landlords, who exhibit the most kindly consideration for the welfare of their tenants. We are not bullied by the police, who are not extreme to mark our little failings,

and are consequently among the most popular members of our little community—the friends of all men. We cannot complain of the magistrates, except that they are too lenient to all offences except very serious ones, and we are thus sometimes encouraged to offend again. Our grievances, however, are quite as real as those of any parish in Kerry or Galway, and, as English politicians have done so much to relieve the wrongs of the Irish, perhaps Mr. Davitt or some other eloquent Irishman may do something for us, and thus the quarrel between the two nations may become less bitter. The particular wrong I wish to bring before the public attention on this occasion, is the length and uninteresting nature of the sermons which we have to listen to every Sunday. The unwritten law requires that we should attend church, and this law is a much more real power than many which are found among the Revised Statutes. This grievance is, therefore, a very serious one, and is a great drawback to the good which might otherwise be done by the clergy. The greatest offender is, of course, the low church clergyman. He regards himself as a missionary preaching the Gospel among the heathen, to whom, of course, the sacramental system of the church must be a dead letter. The labours of the church for centuries are forgotten, the influence of generations of good people is overlooked, the teaching of our childhood is regarded as naught, and we have to be taught everything again, as though we were Hottentots. Men fond of hearing their own voices appear to adopt this view, because it justifies long sermons and exaggerates their personal importance. The low church clergyman is a survival of what was once a great and living school of religious thought; but the tide has ebbed, and the limpets that are left behind are remarkable chiefly for their obstinate clinging to the rocks that, perhaps, the waves may never reach again.

LOSS AND GAIN.

I sorrowed that the golden day was dead,
Its light no more the country-side adorning;
But while I grieved, behold! the east grew red
With morning.

I sighed that merry spring was forced to go,
And doff the wreaths that did so well become
her;
But while I murmured at her absence, lo!
'Twas summer.

I mourned because the daffodils were killed
By burning skies that scorched my early posies;
But while for these I pined, my hands were filled
With roses.

Half broken-hearted, I bewailed the end
Of friendships than which none had once seemed
nearer;
But while I wept, I found a newer friend,
And dearer.

And thus I learned old pleasures are estranged
Only that something better may be given;
Until at last we find this earth exchanged
For heaven.

"DO SOMETHING."

Everything that is written for the benefit of the little ones, is not altogether inapplicable or without benefit to the older ones. As in many instances we correct one over the head of another, so what is written for the younger ones is read by the older ones and made to do them good. Our Heavenly Father has ordained strength, out of the mouths of babes and sucklings, and we frequently receive strength through their very weakness. Very many older people are deterred from doing anything to help the cause of holiness and happiness on earth because they cannot do great things in a great way. This is not the right way to be happy, or to help others to be happy. It is the little things of life that are done each day that make life worth living. The kind word, the pleasant smile, the willing deed, all tend to make up the grand total. The story of the ant is hackneyed, but all the better for being old and for having endured through the ages. Each little mite of an ant performs his

part of the work in removing each grain of sand in making their homes, and in carrying their little mites towards making comforts for the future. A beautiful piece of Mosaic work is gotten together by little bits of stone so small that one would hardly think them worth picking up. Yet a beautiful work is finished by and by. So it is with our lives, we must not wait to see some great work that can be done, but each day fail not to grasp readily and cheerfully each opportunity to do a kindly deed, or say a cheering, comforting word. Each child can do something to brighten life if no more, bring in a pleasant cheerful smile, and gladden the hearts of those around you. Do not wait for opportunities to do what you like in your own way, but do what God lays open to you in his way. There are always those who are less fortunate than we are who will gratefully receive our kindnesses if rendered them in God's way. "Let us work while it is day for the night cometh when no man can work." We must not put off for to-morrow what can be done to-day, but make some one happy each day, for only in this way can we have true happiness.

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An advertisement of this firm appears in another part of this paper. The proprietors of this Agency are well-known and responsible parties. Correspondence will receive prompt and satisfactory attention; write them and see for yourself.

GOD IS LOVE.

History's noblest deed and record of love is in the self-devotion of one generous heathen, Pyllades, who forfeited his life to save his friend; but "God commendeth his love to us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us!" "You have not seen," says a great writer and profound thinker, "the greatest gift of all—the heart of God, the love of his heart, the heart of his love. And will he in very deed show us that? Yes, unveil that cross and see. It was his only mode of showing us his heart. It is infinite love laboring to reveal itself—agonizing to utter the fullness of infinite love. Apart from that act, a boundless ocean of love would have remained for ever shut up and concealed in the heart of God; but now it has found an ocean-channel. Beyond this he cannot go. Once and forever the proof has been given—'God is love.'"—Macduff.

CHRIST AND HYPOCRISY.

The sternness of Christ was elicited in its highest degree by spiritual double dealing, what we ordinarily call hypocrisy; next, though not in such uncompromising terms, by that open covetousness which is the obvious antagonist of all spiritual life, and especially by that deadness to His own personal influence which indicated the supremacy of unspiritual desires over the hearts of the people; and last, with the most passionate emphasis, wherever Christ saw the spirit of the world creeping into a heart that had ardently owed His own spiritual authority, and that was in reality at His own disposal. In other words, Christ was most stern with those who made a pretence of being religious; stern, but not so stern, with those who did not even make a pretence of it, who simply passed Him by as if He had touched no spring of their hearts; but He was most disposed to wound deeply—because He saw in this case that a wound would be most spiritually effectual—where a noble nature was in danger of admitting into its most spiritual motives worldly alloys. Where Christ could win by tenderness, He showed it, even amid the agonies of the cross. When tenderness was a revelation, He was tender no matter how great the force of conflicting motives might be. It was only when it became necessary to characterize justly the monopoly claimed by the world over the heart of man, that His words became instinct with the fire of divine denunciation.—*Spectator*.

—Say not unto thy neighbor, "Go, and come again, and to-morrow I will give;" when thou hast it by thee (Prov. iii. 28.)

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