



LESSON XIII.—DECEMBER 24, 1905.

The Character of the Messiah

(Christmas Lesson.)

Isaiah i., 7.

Golden Text.

Thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins.—Matt. i., 21.

Home Readings.

Monday, December 18.—Is. ix., 1-7.

Tuesday, December 19.—Is. xi., 1-10.

Wednesday, December 20.—Ps. xlv., 1-17.

Thursday, December 21.—Is. xlii., 1-13.

Friday, December 22.—Is. lii., 5-15.

Saturday, December 23.—Is. lxxv., 17-25.

Sunday, December 24.—Jer. xxiii., 1-8.

(By Davis W. Clark.)

In the spirited style of Hebrew poetry, the prophet throws himself beyond, in point of time, the event which he is describing, and speaks of it as having already occurred. He takes the mantle of night to represent the moral state of the people. They were groping in a deathly shadow. Leaders were as blind as the led. All was rayless, cheerless, hopeless. Suddenly, to the anointed vision of Israel's noble seer, there bursts through the leaden pall such a light as is never seen on land or sea. He is ready to cry, 'It is the Star, the Star of Bethlehem!' The great darkness is matched by a great light. It floods not the plains alone, but penetrates the deepest moral chasms of earth. How must Isaiah's heart have glowed at such a goodly sight. He was in a rapture. Hallelujah was on his lips.

He sees a goodly company, an ever-increasing throng, who walk in this new light. Kingdoms of earth, islands of sea are steadily merged into it. It spreads from the river to the ends of the earth. And the joy of the throng keeps pace with its ever-augmenting proportions. It is joy like that when, after all the heat and toil, the harvest is shouted home; or like that after battle, when victors divide spoil.

And this deliverance from darkness—this lifting of the yoke of sin—is recognized by the prophet as supernatural and Divine. The earthly means of its accomplishment are as unequal as Gideon's lamps and pitchers against the grasshopper multitudes of Midianites and Amalekites.

The earthly, historic means of victory is always through the awful din and carnage of battle. But here is a weaponless victory in which the very instruments of human warfare, so far from being used, shall be burned up or beaten into the implements of husbandry.

And all this because the Babe is born in Bethlehem. Born to us—to humanity. The badge of universal spiritual sovereignty shall lie upon His shoulder. Kingdoms of earth, without of necessity losing their identity, shall become His kingdoms.

The Prophet-herald announces His regal titles. How dim the appellations of royalty grow in comparison to His lustrous names. Wonderful—the mystery of whose nature is the amazement of angels and men. Counsellor—the unerring, unfailing Guide in truth and duty; not of the few, but of the race. The mighty God—the very Person of the Omnipotent Deity. The Father of eternity, and the peaceful and peace-producing Prince.

The spiritual domain of this lovely and Divine sovereign, and its gracious concomitants of assurance to the individual and quietness of the multitude, shall unceasingly cover larger areas and included more people.

The pledge of this is the moral earnestness of the glorious Being, who stooped to the incarnation, the cross, the tomb. Jesus is in dead earnest to make His mediatorial work a triumphant success. And all the armies of the sky are obedient at His slightest beck.

ANALYSIS AND KEY.

Isaiah's Proleptic Wisdom.

Anticipates the advent.

Moral darkness of current life.

Sudden irradiation of light.

The Star of Bethlehem in prophet's eye.

The Kingdom of God: Composed of those who walk to the light.

Ever augmenting.

Social renovation supernatural.

Earthly means inadequate.

Prophet-herald Announces Regal Titles.

Wonderful, Counsellor.

Mighty God.

Father of Eternity.

Prince of Peace.

Badge of Universal Spiritual Sovereignty.

Kingdoms of earth His, without losing their identity.

Pledge of this; His moral earnestness.

THE TEACHER'S LANTERN.

Philosophy had proved an egregious failure. Wisdom could not know God. The sage could not save the people who lived on the same street with him, let alone the whole mass. Culture was at one end of the beam and morals at the other; as culture rose, morals sank. Roman law, Greek refinement, had proved equally impotent to save. It seemed as if the advent was delayed in order that the inefficiency of all human expedients might be thoroughly demonstrated.

A fine illustration this, of the nature, force, and integrity of prophecy. Isaiah graphically describes what the moral condition of the race shall be at a given epoch. He describes the sudden entrance of a new corrective force, unlike any which had ever been used before; a weaponless, but victorious, kingdom. He becomes more explicit. He defines the person of the King, enumerates His titles, describes the spread and perpetuity of His kingdom.

The soldier is a waning factor in current civilization. The assertion may seem paradoxical in view of the terrible war just waged. However, this very war has itself just furnished an incident of the possibility of avoiding war altogether by arbitration. Wars have become increasingly infrequent. The late war may be the last. Isaiah's blessed prophecy is on the eve of fulfilment, 'For every boot of those who tramp with boots in the tumult of battle and (every) cloak rolled in blood shall be for burning, a food of fire.' (De-litzsch.) All the accoutrements of war—its weapons offensive and defensive, its blood-spattered uniforms—all shall be incinerated. The horrid demon of human hate shall give up the ghost. There shall yet be universal righteousness, peace and joy.

The universal and millennial extension of the kingdom of God does not involve the overthrow of existing civil governments. Instead of supplanting them, it will infuse them with its principles. It does not even necessitate the perpetuation of any existing ecclesiastical organizations. In its final analysis the kingdom expresses itself in the moral qualities of human souls. It is the universal spread of goodness, and this may be achieved without organized religion.

The human means for the extension of the kingdom of God seem utterly inadequate. But the history of God's ancient people furnishes a helpful and inspiring analogy. 'It shall be as in the days of Midian.' The reference is to Gideon's breaking the seven years' dominion of the Midianites and utterly routing them. His band was paltry in numbers. His resources were grotesquely inadequate—trumpets, lamps, and pitchers. But his victory was signal.

C. E. Topic.

Sunday, December 24.—Topic—The brotherhood of man. I. John ii., 7-11; iii., 12-15. (A Christmas missionary meeting.)

Christianity was the projection of a brand-new proposition in social life, individual and organized. It controverted all proverbial

philosophy and challenged the natural instincts of man. Jesus first irradiated this truth in His command, 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' Next to Jesus St. John is the most forceful advocate of brotherhood. He puts it negatively, 'He that hateth his brother is in darkness.' He puts it positively, 'He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and gives no occasion for stumbling.' More and more the arbitrary boundaries of race and political organization are overleaped, and that, too, in no mere sentiment, but in the practical helpfulness of Christian services.

Junior C. E. Topic.

GIFTS TO GOD.

Monday, December 18.—Offer thanksgiving. Ps. i., 14.

Tuesday, December 19.—Offer praise. Ps. i., 23.

Wednesday, December 20.—Offer it continually. Heb. xiii., 15.

Thursday, December 21.—Give to His children. Matt. xxv., 34-40.

Friday, December 22.—Give yourselves willingly. II. Chron. xvii., 16.

Saturday, December 23.—Give service. I. Chron. xxix., 5.

Sunday, December 24.—Topic—The wise men's gifts and ours. Matt. ii., 11; Prov. xxiii., 26.

The Sunday School Teacher's Opportunity.

(Daniel H. Martin, D.D., in the 'Christian Intelligencer'.)

Sunday school statistics for the past few years reveal the melancholy fact that a very small portion of our Sunday school scholars have united with the Church. Some one who has taken the trouble to look this matter up submits that only about one-fifth of the youth of the Sunday schools of our Church confessed Christ during a certain period. We may assume that at least sixty per cent. of those who have passed out of the Sunday school will go to their death beds without a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. May we not trace this to the fact that large numbers of Sabbath school teachers have failed to present Jesus Christ to the children as a living and present Saviour? Instruction in Scriptural truth is important, but it is more important to lead these young souls directly to Jesus Christ. When we meet in the street some human wreck, whose face is tracked with the footprints of sin, we realize that he was once an innocent little boy, susceptible to the call of Christ to a holy life. When we see some lost creature in woman's shape, we are reminded that she was once an innocent little girl. If we would save our boys and girls from a wrecked manhood or womanhood we must exert every power to lead them to Christ early.

This, Sunday school teachers, is your opportunity. You, in a large measure, are the moulders of the destinies of the children under your care. Many of those tender plants have no spiritual training at home, everything, therefore depends on faithful work in the Sabbath school, and no other work excels this in importance.

What Paper to Order for Next Year.

The annual question of Sunday School papers is up again and the teachers and superintendents are considering all sides of it. We are always glad to hear from those in charge of the schools what they think the best features of our paper, or wherein they think we might make improvements. From the Boys and Girls the verdict is clear. It is stories they want, and still more stories. 'We hate pictures with no story to them,' the small boys announced, and a big girl and boy added their word in favor of real stories, and 'Please put in a Serial Story,' they added, it makes something to look forward to on Sunday after school.'

Now we have got a serial story we think will make every boy and girl unwilling to lose even one number, and it only remains for the Superintendents to order in time to get the New Year number, in which the first chapters will appear.