Sabbath School.

BIBLE LESSONS.

FOURTH QUARTER.

STUDIES IN ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

(Condensed from Peloubet's Select Notes.)

Lesson XIII. Dec. 25. Luke 2: 8-20.

THE BIRTH OF CHRIST.

A CHRISTMAS LESSON.

GOLDEN TEXT.

"Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy."—Luke 2: 10.

EXPLANATORY.

8. *And there were in the same country.* In the fields near Bethlehem. *Keeping watch over their flock by night.* Literally, keeping the night-watches. Thieves, wild beasts, and the dangers of the rough precipices form the chief reasons for a night-watch over the flocks. There is nothing in this statement against the probability of Christ's birth having taken place in December. Schubert says that the period about Christmas is often one of the loveliest periods of the whole year. Note that this great religious blessing came to the shepherds while employed about their daily work. The best place in all the world to be is at the post of duty. Nowhere else can such blessings, temporal or spiritual, be fairly looked for.

9. *And, lo, the angel* (not "the" but "an" angel) *of the Lord. And the glory of the Lord.* The radiant brightness which in all ages has been the best symbol and manifestation of God's nature, expressing wisdom, love, power, purity, mystery, eternity, omnipresence.

10. *And the angel said . . . Fear not.* The glad tidings of a Saviour, bringing light and love, a father in heaven, and forgiveness of sins, can alone take away all fear from the soul. *I bring you good tidings of great joy.* The best tidings the world ever heard. *To all people.* All the people of Israel. But also we learn elsewhere, to all people, all ages, all nations, all classes, all colors. *A Saviour.* "Jesus" means Saviour. *Christ.* "The Anointed One," the Messiah, Hebrew for "Anointed One," whom they had long been hoping and praying for. He is called "Anointed," because he had been divinely set apart for this work, as kings and high priests were set apart by anointing with oil. Note the three names of Christ, as expressing great truths of our salvation.

12. *Wrapped in swaddling clothes.* That is, not garments regularly made, as with us, but bands or blankets that confined the limbs closely, and were intended to prevent distortion. *Lying in a manger.* The mangers are built of small stones and mortar in the shape of a box, or, rather, of a kneading-trough.

13. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host.* Literally, of the heavenly army. The veil between the seen and the unseen was rent, and the sky above Bethlehem was peopled with hosts of angels, for the King of angels was born there.

14. This song consists of two strains—
1. Glory — to God — in heaven.
2. Peace, good will — to men — on earth.

FIRST STRAIN. *Glory to God.* Expressing both the *fact* that God is glorious in the work of salvation, and the *feeling* that would express and make known His glory. *In the highest.* Only the most exquisite music and song is worthy to express this theme.

SECOND STRAIN. *And on earth peace,* including all welfare and blessing, here and hereafter. Peace between man and God, resulting in peace between man and man, and the soul's peace with itself, and with its surroundings, and with the law of God. *Good will toward men.* There are two readings of this phrase in the original, which differ from each other by only a single letter—*s.* The authorities for either reading are of nearly equal weight, but the preponderance is rather in favor of *eudokias* and the Revised Version, and the tendency of scholars has been in the same direction, though of late the tide seems to have turned. Dr. Scrivener says that the reading of the Old Version, *eudokia,* "has the virtually unanimous evidence of the Greek fathers, with an authority from which there is, or ought to be, no appeal."

15. *Let us now go.* At once, without delay. They had so much faith in the angel's message that they proceeded to investigate and see for themselves.

17. *They made known abroad.* Whosoever has truly found the Saviour burns to "proclaim to all around what a Saviour they have found."

20. *The shepherds returned.* To their duty as shepherds. After our holiest communion with God, our views from the Pisgahs of life, our insight into the word and heaven on the mounts of transfiguration, we must return to our daily duties, but with a new life in them, a new blessing on them. *Glorifying* expresses the feeling of the greatness of the work. *Praising* refers to the goodness displayed in it.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS.

1. The mission of the Son of God to this world is the greatest event in history.

2. The greatest gifts of God sometimes come in the humblest form; as, all literature in the letters of the alphabet, the salvation of the world in a babe in a manger.

3. God's special favors come to men without regard to class or outward condition; the angel's message and song to poor shepherds; the star to the wise men of the East; to each one in the best way.

4. If salvation by Jesus Christ is so important in the eyes of the angels, how much more should we value the salvation of our souls, and spread the news of salvation around the world.

The Cause of Rheumatism.

An acid which exists in sour milk and cider, called lactic acid, is believed by physicians to be the cause of rheumatism. Accumulating in the blood, it attacks the fibrous tissues in the joints, and causes agonizing pains. What is needed is a remedy to neutralize the acid, and to invigorate the kidneys and liver that all waste will be carried off. Hood's Sarsaparilla is heartily recommended by many whom it has cured of rheumatism. It possesses just the desired qualities, and so thoroughly purifies the blood as to prevent occurrence of rheumatic attacks. We suggest a trial of Hood's Sarsaparilla by all who suffer from rheumatism.

The Little Stranger.

Until Madge was nine years old she had no little friends of her own age, and was obliged to play with her dolls and her pet dog Rollo. She lived near a great city in China, where her father had a school, and tried to teach the little Chinese boys how to be good. Madge was never lonely in her far-away home, because she loved her father with all her heart; for he had watched and tended her all her life.

One day Madge's father, Mr. Barlow, came to her, and said he was going home once more to America, and Madge was to go with him. The little girl was very glad at this, for she wanted to see the wonderful country where nearly every one was white, and where only tiny girls wore their hair braided down their backs. She was a little frightened at the thought of meeting so many strange people, and seeing so many aunts and uncles; but Madge was brave and took great pleasure in packing up.

At last, after China had been left behind for ever so many days, Madge and her father reached the place where old Mrs. Barlow, Madge's grandmother, lived. I can't begin to tell you how glad dear grandma was to see her nine-year-old granddaughter; and Madge felt as though she had known her always. Grandma had invited a little girl to visit Madge, so that they might make friends with each other; for up to that time, you know, Madge had never had any companions of her own age. She was very shy and timid at first; and Bessie, her little visitor, did not know what to say. At last Bessie began asking her about her friends, and Madge told her of her dolls and Rollo.

"But weren't there any little girls to play with?" asked Bessie.

"Oh, no!" said Madge, as though she had never thought of the matter.

Then Bessie told of all her playmates and school friends, and thought it must be the greatest fun in the world to live in America.

After awhile it was Madge's turn to tell about things in China, and Bessie listened with wide-open eyes. Madge told of the curious people, and the funny way they lived. She described the odd dresses of the Chinese, and the queer little houses, until Bessie clapped her hands and shouted with glee.

"Can you speak any Chinese?" Bessie asked suddenly; and then, to her astonishment, Madge began to say some words that sounded just like a nonsense rhyme. If you have ever heard any Chinese, you know how curious it is, and when Madge stopped, Bessie burst out laughing.

"Oh! what did you say?" cried Bessie. But Madge grew suddenly shy again, because she thought Bessie was laughing at her. Then Bessie begged her to go on again; and, when Madge had finished, Bessie thought she was the smartest girl in the world.

"There is my friend Kittie at the gate," said Bessie, just then. "Let me call her in." And she ran toward her.

Presently Bessie came back, leading Katie; but Madge was just as shy as she was when she first met Bessie. They stood before each other for a minute without saying anything, and then Bessie begged Madge to speak some more of that "jing-a-ling" language, as she called Chinese. Madge did as she was asked, and then told Kittie about the same curious things she had spoken of to Bessie; and, when she was through, the three little girls were the best of friends.

Madge now has a lot of playmates of her own age, but Bessie and Kittie are her two dearest friends; and they are very proud of Madge because she can tell about wondrous things. All the girls like to hear Madge talk away in the Chinese language. But Madge remembers the time when she had only the dolls and Rollo, and she is very happy with her new friends. The only thing that she regrets is that she had to leave dear old Rollo in far-away China.—*Harper's Young People.*

"Mother, Never Despair."

Mothers should never despair of the conversion of their children. Over and over again incidents have occurred which have amply testified that God does hear and answer prayer, although it may not be exactly in the way or at the time they most desire.

The case of St. Augustine is one which teaches parents never to give up hoping and praying while life lasts. His early days had been spent in reckless self-indulgence. He plunged into the worst sins of those heathen times in which he lived. He had also adopted wild opinions which helped to justify him in such a course.

For a long time he remained a heathen, though, as he afterwards owned, not without some struggles of conscience and strivings of God's Spirit against such evil habits.

Often he struggled, and often he fell. But he had, too, advantages which again and again have saved many a soul from death; privileges, too, which those who possess can not too highly prize—he had a pious mother and good friends. His good mother prayed for him, warned him, and gave him such advice as only a good mother can give. At the time it seemed to be of no avail, and was quickly forgotten, although remembered long afterwards.

His friends also watched for every opportunity to encourage him in better thoughts, and to bring him to a better life; but for a time their labors seemed to be of no avail. However, while in that condition of struggle and failure he visited the city of Milan, where lived one who became almost as famous as himself as a Christian, named Ambrose.

Sitting with his friend, his whole soul shaken with the violence of his inward conflict, he felt that the life he was leading was poor, profitless, and burdensome. Silently they sat together, but at last, to use his own words, "when deep reflections had brought together and heaped up all the misery in the sight of my heart, there arose a mighty storm of grief, bringing a shower of tears."

He arose, and left his friend, to weep alone in solitude. He threw himself down under a fig tree in the garden (the spot is still pointed out in Milan), where he cried in the bitterness of his soul:

"How long? how long?—to-morrow? —to-morrow? Why not now! why is there not this hour an end to uncleanness?"

"So was I speaking and weeping in the contrition of my heart," he adds, "when, lo! I heard a voice as of a child chanting and oft repeating, 'Take up and read, take up and read.' Instantly my countenance altered. I began to think whether children were wont in play to sing such words, nor could I remember even to have heard the like.

"So, checking my tears, I rose, taking it to be a command from God to open the book and read the first chapter I should find."

Early he returned to the place where his friend Ambrose was sitting, and found lying by him the volume of St. Paul's Epistle, which he was studying.

"I seized it," he adds; "I opened it and in silence read that passage on which my eyes fell: 'Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.' No further could I read, nor needed I, for instantly, at the end of this sentence, by a serene light infused into my soul, all the darkness of doubt vanished away."

In a moment he was cheered, calmed and converted. Putting his finger on the place, he went to a faithful friend, Alypius, who had long in vain tried to reclaim him from his wild career, and showed it to him.

His friend saw at a glance a change had come over him, as he looked at the passage to which Augustine drew his attention and which had wrought his conversion, and heartily rejoiced.

His eye then wandered to the words which stand at the beginning of the next chapter: "Him that is weak in the flesh receive."

He accepted that as advice how to act towards the new convert, and threw no obstacle in his way, but took him by the hand and led him to his mother, and in her presence the joy of the returned penitent was complete.

From that day Augustine broke away from all his evil companions to the joy of his mother's heart. After being baptized by his friend Ambrose, he became transformed from a profligate African youth into one of the most illustrious preachers and writers, whose words are still cherished and read with profit by thousands of Christians in all parts of the world.—*John W. Kirton, LL. D., in Christian Commonwealth.*

The Realities of Life.

It is for this rare, precious quality of truthfulness that I delight in many Dutch paintings, which lofty-minded people despise. I find a source of delicious sympathy in these simple pictures of a monotonous, homely existence, which has been the fate of so many more among my fellow-mortals than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering, or of world-stirring actions. I turn without shrinking from cloud-born angels, from prophets, sibyls, and heroic warriors to an old woman bending over her flower-pot, or eating her solitary dinner, while the noon-day light, softened by a screen of leaves, falls on her mob-cap, and just touches the rim of her spinning-wheel, and her stone jug, and all those cheap, common things which are the precious necessaries of life to her. Things may be lovable that are not altogether handsome. I am not at all sure that the majority of the human race have not been ugly, yet there is a great deal of family love among us. I have a friend or two whose class of features is such that the Apollo curve on the summit of their brows would be decidedly trying; yet, to my certain knowledge, tender hearts have beaten for them, and their miniatures—flattering, but still not lovely—are kissed in regret by motherly lips. I have seen many an excellent matron, who could never in her best days have been handsome, and yet she had a packet of yellow love-letters in a private drawer, and sweet children showered kisses on her sallow cheeks. And I believe there have been plenty of young heroes of middle stature and feeble beards who have felt quite sure they could never love anything more insignificant than a Diana, and yet have found themselves in middle life happily settled with a wife who waddles.

Yes! thank God! human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth; it does not wait for beauty—it flows with resistless force, and brings beauty with it.—*George Eliot.*

The Faithful Guide.

In the grounds of Hampton Court, twelve miles from London, is a labyrinth in which Henry VIII., who had constructed it, wandered about for his amusement. One beautiful afternoon in the autumn, a clergyman relates that after spending hours among the picture galleries in the palace, and visiting the room where Oliver Cromwell parted for the last time with his lovely daughter, he wandered away into the park, among the delicate, light-footed deer, and at length came to this labyrinth. He saw people entering it, and heard them say they could find their way out easy enough, and he, too, was led to attempt it. It was very easy to go in a long distance; but when he turned to find his way back it was a different matter. Whichever path among the high hawthorn hedges he took, he soon reached the end. He could not even find the people whom a little before he had seen entering this strange place. He seemed to walk miles, and yet to be no nearer the end. It was getting dark, and he began to fear that he might be compelled to lie down upon the cold ground for the night. All this time a man had been standing upon a high tower close by, waiting for him to lift his eyes to him and ask him to guide him out. Quickly the clergyman said, "Dear sir, will you please show me the way out of this dark place?" "Oh, yes!" he replied, and with a long pole soon helped him to thread his way to the green lawn again. All that was necessary was for the wanderer to look up in faith to the guide whose sole duty it was to direct the bewildered strangers.—*Pearls of Faith.*

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