



LESSON I.—JAN. 1, 1899.

Christ the True Church.

John i., 1-14. Memory verses 9-12.

Golden Text.

'In him was life and the life was the light of men.' (John i., 4.)

The Story.

This is the Christmas story as an angel might tell it. First the Word, who is Jesus, was—not was created, for he was before all created things in the beginning with God, God himself. The original Greek says even more emphatically, 'God was the Word.' In the beginning when God created the heaven and the earth (Gen. i., 1.) the Son of God shared in his labor, for 'without him was not anything made that was made.' 'In him was life' (John v., 26.) and his life gives light and life and love to men. The light shines in darkness and the darkness can not overcome it, (the margin of the revised version reads thus), and the darkness cannot understand the light.

God sent a man named John to testify of the light, and to proclaim that that true Light was coming into the world as a Man. The Word, the visible expression of the Father's love, should come, and all who should receive him as God should be regenerated or born into the family of God. He knew beforehand that most of his own people would not receive him, he knew beforehand what agonies he should suffer before his work should be accomplished, yet he did not withhold himself—the Word was made flesh, the Son of God took upon himself the nature of humanity that first wonderful Christmas morning. Christ dwelt with men, and to those who received him he revealed the glory of the Father and his nature of grace and truth.

Suggestions.

For six months we are to study the beautiful story of our Saviour's life by the 'beloved apostle' John. Last year we studied in Matthew's gospel the human nature of our Lord, but John's story reveals to us the oneness of Jesus with his Father. Our Lord Jesus Christ is a man, a Jewish man, who reigns in heaven because he is God. Perfect God and perfect man. This is a mystery far too deep for us to understand now, but if we believe it here we may understand it perfectly in heaven. A little child can not understand how steam makes a great big engine go so fast, but his inability to understand does not alter the truth. There are many things in this world that we must as sensible people believe without understanding.

Each teacher should see that his scholars are provided with bibles, and not depending on 'lesson sheets,' which can not but give a child the impression that the bible is a series of little anecdotes having no particular connection with each other. Young people should be given an accurate knowledge of the scriptures, such as they can only get from the book itself. They should be taught that God's word is not a collection of parables and anecdotes, simply, but one majestic message from God revealing his love for mankind, and his hatred of evil. The Old Testament has the same authority as the New, for our Saviour quoted from it many prophecies and testimonies concerning himself. (John v., 39; Luke xxiv., 27, 32.) Each of the writers of the New Testament quote from the Old, there are about six hundred and forty references to the Old Testament in the New.

If any teacher feels that he cannot provide his scholars with whole bibles, the next best thing is to give them Testaments, or the Gospel by John, in large print, the latter can be obtained at the Bible House, Phillips square, Montreal, for one cent a copy! These little books are within the reach of every one, and would make a pleasing and useful New Year's gift to your scholars. It would be a rather good plan to mark the lessons in the book, so that your class would be without the usual lame excuse of not knowing where the lesson is. The first quarter's lessons are as follows.

I. Jan. 1 Christ the true light. John i., 1-14

- II. Jan. 8. Christ's first disciples. John i., 35-46.
- III. Jan. 15. Christ's first miracle. John ii., 1-11.
- IV. Jan. 22. Christ and Nicodemus. John iii., 1-16.
- V. Jan. 29. Christ at Jacob's well. John iv., 5-15.
- V. Feb. 5. The nobleman's son. John vi., 43-54.
- VII. Feb. 12. Christ's Divine Authority. John v., 17-27.
- VIII. Feb. 19. Christ feeding the five thousand. John vi., 1-14.
- IX. Feb. 26. Christ at the feast. John vii., 14, 28-37.
- X. Mar. 5. Christ freeing from sin. John viii., 12, 31-36.
- XI. Mar. 12. Christ healing the blind man. John ix., 1-11.
- XII. Mar. 19. Christ the Good Shepherd. John x., 1-16.
- XIII. Mar. 26. Review.

Questions.

1. By whom was this gospel written?
2. Who created the world?
3. Who was sent to bear witness of God's Son?
4. Did God's chosen people receive his Son?
5. How can a man become a son of God?

John the Evangelist.

John was the son of Zebedee and Salome, and was probably born at Bethsaida, (by interpretation Fishville,) at the northern end of Lake Gennesaret. That his parents were respectable in rank, and easy in their pecuniary circumstances, is inferred from the fact that John was acquainted with the high priest, that his father employed hired workmen in his fishery, and that John was able to provide for the mother of Jesus at his own house, probably in Jerusalem. He is indeed called in the Acts of the Apostles 'unlettered;' but that simply signifies that he was not a professional man; that he was neither priest nor scribe, but an ordinary layman. His father, Zebedee, probably died before John's apostolate. His mother, Salome, appears to have been a woman of piety, who became attached to Jesus, not without high Messianic hopes, and lived within the circle of the Christian Church after the resurrection of Christ.

The first great point of John's life was his becoming, we know not by what means, a disciple of the Baptist. The tradition, however, is found in some early writers that Zebedee was an uncle of the Baptist, and therefore the Baptist and the Evangelist were cousins. However this be, this discipleship attests the early religious tendencies of John, and doubtless inspired his heart with an expectation of a Messiah near.

The next great turn of John's life, and its most important crisis, was his acquaintance with Jesus. To this he was led by his discipleship under the Baptist. The deep interest with which at the latest period of his life he remembered his first introduction to Jesus, is shown by the fresh minute narrative he gives of it in the first chapter of his gospel. On the banks of the Jordan, afar from his Galilean home, he is standing; and he listens while the Baptist gives his testimony to the Messiah, freshly arrived from the scene of temptation, and at once and forever he receives the testimony. He is forthwith accepted by Jesus as his disciple, with a few others, as the rudiments of his future apostolic college. After the miraculous draft of fishes he was especially called to be, not only a disciple, but a teacher, a fisher of men. At the complete inauguration of the college, followed by the Sermon on the Mount, John is incorporated into that body. He is repeatedly named as one of the elect three, Peter, James and John. This James was his elder brother, and it is remarkable that these brothers were the first and last of the apostolic martyrs.

John was distinguished at once by the simplicity of his character and the ardor of his affections. And those affections had a double side: one of deep love for Jesus and his gospel, and the other of intense antagonism of heart for all opposed to Christ. Hence, while, on the one side, he was the disciple 'whom Jesus loved,' and who leaned upon the Saviour's bosom, on the other, he would have called down fire on the Samaritans, who rejected Jesus, and was significantly named 'a son of thunder.' And thus we see how, in the closing period of his life, he could, within a single brief period, write these epistles which are redolent with the deepest spirit of love, and yet record the

visions of his Apocalypse in language of the most terrible sublimity.

The next great turn in John's life was his departure for the East, to take apostolic charge of the churches planted by Paul in Asia Minor. This probably took place soon after the death of Paul, and would bring us to about A.D. 63 or 66. During his residence in Asia Minor he was banished by one of the Roman Emperors to Patmos, an island in the Aegean Sea. His life extended to the close of the first century of the Christian era. According to Jerome, he was a hundred years old.—Whedon's Commentary.

Practical Points.

A. H. CAMERON.

In his being God had no beginning. No one but Jesus and the Holy Spirit was with God forever, and no one else is equal to God. A blessed Trinity whose friendship makes fallen man the happiest of mortals. Verses 1, 2.

How close the relation between light and life when our hearts are laid on God's altar and he has lit the fire. Verse 4.

Nothing but light can banish darkness. Verse 5: Genesis i., 2, 3.

Sweet was the message, faithful was the messenger, and merciful was the Master. Yet many would not believe. Verses 6, 7, 8: Matt. iii., 7, 8.

Jesus is the luminary from whom all other lights borrow their brightness. The light of reason as well as the light of faith comes from him. Verse 9.

Ignorance is never bliss when God is absent from the mind of man. Verses 10, 11: Psalm x., 4.

Jesus believed is heaven received, and the new birth is the greatest miracle on earth. Verses 12, 13.

When Jesus became flesh he came very near the sinner so that the weakest soul might grasp his loving hand. Verse 14.

Tiverton, Ont.

Christian Endeavor Topic.

The angel presence for the New Year. (Exodus xxiii., 20-25.)

The Teacher's Point Of View.

(Margaret E. Sangster in 'Sunday-school Times'.)

The point of view of some teachers is the social one,—the bringing together of young people from different families, and fusing them into an amicable weekly circle, like an informal and quite intimate club. This point of view is an excellent one from which to start, but it is valuable more for the opportunities it makes possible than for any lasting good which it accomplishes.

Other teachers are scholarly and diligent, make very thorough preparation, and to the lesson of the hour are able to bring much that is strong and suggestive by way of collateral reading and testimony. To be with such teachers is to a certain extent a liberal education, and their knowledge of literature and disciplined powers of intellect enable them to make Bible study very interesting. Sometimes, even, it is too interesting for real profit, as the efflorescence of poetry and the charm of science lead away from the Word. The teachers do not intend but they have looked at the matter from the intellectual point of view, to the detriment of spirituality.

More and more it grows on me, after a happy life of service, that the only safe aim for us is to strive to be co-workers with God. In our classes there is given to us, in perhaps a closer degree, perhaps at closer range, the privilege of coming heart to heart with our scholars. The little group gathers with a beautiful loyalty around the teacher. All unconsciously the teacher is the scholar's model. There is absent something of the restraint of the secular school. There is present the very winzomeness of love, its potency, its abounding charm.

Shall we not for ourselves, in these brilliant weeks of our winter work, seek a larger endowment of the Spirit? Shall we be contented with less than our Lord is willing and waiting to give us? Shall we not go to our classes seeing Jesus only, our point of view being his; our desire to bring all the resources of personality, prayer and consecration, to the conversion of our scholars? And then, shall we not try to lead them, as our Master and Friend would have us, into a way of self-denial, of loving devotedness, of rich outpouring for him, in his name?