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NOTE.—The Compiler will be grateful to friends who send corrections or additions. While the Index is proceeding, references will be given in another column on texts not yet reached, if application is made for them. If requested, other sources of information bearing upon texts or biblical subjects will also be pointed out. Any suggestion, whereby this department can be made of more practical value, will be heartily welcomed.

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Sunday School.

International Lessons for February.

SHORT NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

I.

Feb. 2.—Luke ii. 25-35.

Jesus brought into the Temple.

This lesson is short, and presents little difficulty. We may notice:

1. "The Consolation of Israel" (verse 25). It was a common title for the expected Messiah. The same word is used by Jesus when He speaks of the "Comforter," but the form of Christ's word is more *personal*.

2. "After the custom of the law" (verse 27). If a male

child was the first-born of his mother, he had to be brought to the Temple when forty days old, and *redeemed*. Five shekels were paid for his ransom. If not redeemed he was consecrated to the Lord in the service of the Temple, as Samuel was.

3. "A sign that shall be spoken against" (verse 34). Many illustrations of the stumbling-block of the Cross will be found in the first number of the EXPOSITORY TIMES, under the "Great Text Commentary".

The interest of the lesson gathers round Simeon. We know nothing of him but what is told us here; but it is enough. He stands in the centre of a most attractive picture. The scene is the Temple—Herod's magnificent Temple, one of the wonders of the world. Joseph has

come, with Mary the young mother and the infant Jesus, to offer the turtle-doves and the ransom money; and Simeon has been *sent* to meet them; and there they stand together. There were many groups at the Temple that day, but this is the one best worth the studying.

Simeon is described by four things. He was *just* in his intercourse with men; he was *devout* also, for he held intercourse with God ("He said his prayers," a little child once put it, and she was right); and then he had a definite object in life and a noble one,—he waited to see the Messiah before he died. Last of all, we are told that the Holy Ghost was upon him. For when a man lives very near to God, the Spirit of God lives very near to him, and you know it by his very look. When Moses got very near God his face shone; so, no doubt, Simeon had the look and the smile of a good man, and children would be fond of him.

One morning he was early at the Temple, for he had been told that the desire of his life would be satisfied. Then, when Mary came with her infant in her arms, Simeon knew Him at once. Most likely there were other infants there, but he knew that *this* was the Christ of God. For the cleverest things on earth are goodness and love.

Then, with the infant in his arms, he burst forth into song. It is the third song we have had, and we call it the "Nunc Dimittis" from its first two words in Latin. But is it not a prayer, quite as much as a song? A prayer in melody we might call it. It was only what Simeon was accustomed to do, but higher and more prophetic than usual, for this was the greatest moment in his life. We may see how noble a song it is when he speaks of Christ being a light to the Gentiles. It took a special vision upon the house top, as well as a severe rebuke from St. Paul, to teach that lesson to St. Peter.

As Joseph and Mary stood wondering, Simeon turned and blessed them. He did not bless Jesus, for "the less is blessed by the greater". Watch the gospels in these little things and you will see how true they are. He blessed them both, but he spoke to Mary alone. "This child is placed for the falling and rising of many in Israel". A single incident in Christ's life will illustrate that: the scene in the house of Simon the pharisee, when the woman which was a sinner had her sins forgiven, while Simon was openly rebuked. How their positions were reversed!—(Luke vii. 36-50.)

But the most striking part of his "blessing" is the parenthesis—"A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also"—strange blessing! and yet it *is* a blessing. *Read Mr. Smith's sermon in this number.* It was a blessing to Mary even, we do not doubt; a blessing to St. Paul, and it may be a blessing to us.

There is a sermon on the "Consolation of Israel" by Dean Alford, in *Quebec Chapel Sermons*, vi. 71; one on the "golden text" (verse 32) by Maurice, in *Lincoln's Inn Sermons*, 2nd series, i. 113; a very fine one by Tholuck on "Christ the Touchstone of Human Hearts" (verse 35), in *Select Discourses*, page 315; and an excellent study of the whole subject by the Dean of Llandaff, in *Good Words*, 1865, page 242.

II.

Feb. 9.—Luke ii. 40-52.

Childhood and Youth of Jesus.

A delightful lesson—a true story about a boy, and so lovable a boy besides.

The 40th verse is not a part of the story, but refers to Jesus when a *child*. Our last lesson spoke of Him as an infant; this verse is all that is said of Him as a child; then the rest of the chapter is all we know of Him as a boy. When next He appears He is a man of thirty, and entered upon His work. But this short verse gives a very beautiful picture of the child. It speaks of His *body*—He waxed strong (the words "in spirit" should be omitted); of His *mind*—He was being filled with wisdom; and of His *spirit*—the loving favour of God was upon Him. There is a model for any child! A little volume of *Sermons for Children* by Dean Stanley, published after his death by Murray, opens with a simple but very beautiful sermon on this verse. For greater fulness consult F. W. Robertson, 2nd series, page 175.

We now come to the story of Christ's boyhood. There is little difficulty in it. Joseph and Mary were living in Nazareth now, but, like all earnest Israelites, they took a yearly journey to Jerusalem to the Passover. During the rest of the year they lived quietly at Nazareth, Joseph working at his trade, Mary occupied with her home and the teaching of her little Boy. When Jesus was twelve years old they took Him with them to Jerusalem. It was His "Confirmation" or "first Communion" as we should say. He was very young for that, but boys develop faster in the East than in the West, and twelve was the usual age. He had never been at Jerusalem since He was an Infant in arms. What an experience it must have been! Think of Him sitting down to the paschal supper and partaking of the lamb, whose death was a figure of His own! At that supper it was a custom for the son to stand up and ask his father, "What mean ye by this feast?" No doubt Jesus followed the custom, and Joseph explained it as well as he could.

When the feast was over they all started for home. Joseph and Mary journeying with their friends, with whom they regularly made this journey; the young people together by themselves, talking over the scenes they had witnessed, and trying to understand the meaning of it all. And Joseph and Mary thought that Jesus had joined the rest of His companions; so that it was only when they halted at the end of the first day's journey that they discovered he was not in the company at all. Back they came to Jerusalem. What an anxious heart Mary must have had! Another night passed before they found Him in the Temple.

"When they saw Him they were amazed." No doubt they were proud of Him in their hearts; but Mary thought it necessary to chide Him gently for causing them so much anxiety. What an answer Jesus gave! So tender, so noble, so much above their highest understanding. And then He went home with them as an obedient son.

The children will need no enticement to get up an interest in this lesson. But if possible their interest should be fixed

upon that great saying of Jesus which forms the centre of it—"Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?" "In My Father's house" is probably the correct translation, but they need not be puzzled with that. How did He come to say this? Why did He stay among the doctors at all? Dr. Whyte thinks that, on the journey up to Jerusalem, Mary, for the first time, took Him and told Him the story of His birth, of the angels, the magi, Simeon, and the flight into Egypt. It was an overpowering revelation, but, like all other Divine revelations, it carried with it its own support, for no sooner was it uttered than His whole soul rose up within Him to receive, as it were, the rain from heaven, and His whole life quickened into new energy by His mother's Divine and glorious announcement.

If this was so, and there is great probability in it, we can think what an intense interest the whole Passover ceremony must have had. We can understand how He would be absorbed in the thoughts of it, bringing His knowledge of the Prophets to bear upon it; and we can believe that it was to question the Rabbis about the Messiah and the kingdom of God that He stayed behind. We must not for a moment let the children suppose that He stayed to parade his learning or acuteness. This would also explain the force of His saying to His mother—"Wist ye not?" *She* surely should have known, she who had told Him it all.

The simpler—the more *human*—the explanations of Christ's growth, Christ's wisdom, Christ's goodness, the better. There is no conflict in the Gospel, no hesitation, no fear of forgetting His Divinity—so we should teach. Read Ullmann's *Simlessness of Jesus*, if possible, on the whole subject. Moreover, there is a great sermon on this story by Professor Rothe, found at page 100 of his *Sermons for the Christian Year*, a book not known at all as it ought to be. On Christ's words to His mother Samuel Cox has an interesting sermon in his *Bird's Nest*, page 16. And those who have Vallings' *Jesus Christ, the Divine Man*, will enjoy his sixth chapter on the Divine Youth.

III.

February 16.—Luke iii. 1-22.

The Ministry of John.

1. Of the names in verse 1.—*Tiberius* was the successor of Augustus, and so the second Roman emperor; *Herod* is Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, and murderer of the Baptist; *Philip* was another son of Herod the Great; the others explain themselves. The places will be understood in a moment by a reference to a map.

2. "The wilderness" must have been the barren tract to the north of the Dead Sea, described as the deepest and hottest chasm in the world, where the sirocco blows without intermission. Dr. Robinson, the great traveller, says: "A more frightful desert it has hardly been our lot to behold".

3. The quotation of verse 4 will be found in Isa. xl. 3. The imagery is taken from the preparations made for the march of an Eastern king.

4. "Generation of vipers"—that is, "offspring" or

"brood of vipers". The words were applied to the Pharisees and Sadducees, as St. Matthew says. Our Lord used the same expression of the Pharisees (Matt. xxiii. 33). Their hypocrisy and its results merited the severest condemnation. They would not enter the kingdom of Heaven themselves, and—which was worse—they kept others from entering it. Here they would have had baptism *without* repentance, without admitting the need of it.

The great subject is John's preaching. But the figure of John himself is a very attractive one for children. Covered with a rough shirt made of camel's hair, and living on the simplest food, he appears on the edge of the wilderness, a fearless preacher, with an urgent, soul-searching message. But why did he ever go into the wilderness? Because of sin, the reality and the weight of it; because he must understand it and its deadly power; because he must find the way to free himself from the burden of it. That which drove John into the wilderness was a deep sense of sin, and a great hungering for purity and holiness. And what did he learn there? He read the Prophets, especially the prophet Isaiah; and he came to know that there is pardon for sin. The wilderness did not teach him the origin of evil, but it taught him how to get rid of evil. Alone with God and the Word of God, he learned that all needed to repent, and that all would find pardon if they did.

So he came forth, and began to preach the Baptism of Repentance for the pardon of sins. It is easy to explain what that means if we refer to two Old Testament sayings—Ezek. xxxvi. 25, "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean"; and Zech. xiii. 1, "In that day there shall be a fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness". There (where, no doubt, John himself found them) we have the two points of his preaching, repentance for all, and an outward sign of repentance, baptism.

Now, think of the crowds that gather to this new preacher. Who will say that the preaching of stern truths is unpopular? And it can scarcely be said that John smites the sin and spares the sinner. He gets at the consciences of the persons before him till they cry, "What shall we do then?" How many a preacher would leap for joy to hear that cry! And he tells them, deals with them practically, personally, fearlessly, laying his finger firmly on the blackest spots in their character. To the ordinary people he says, Deal generously with your neighbours; some of them are poorer than you; help them with food and clothing. To the tax-gatherers, Do not cheat or frighten the people into paying heavier taxes than they ought. And to the soldiers, Do not browbeat the poor, be not spies against the rich, raise no rebellious clamour for higher pay. It was hard hitting. For John will have deeds, not words. To him, as to James, faith without works is dead.

But, with all his fearlessness, see how humble he is. Not worthy to untie His shoe! John's relation to Jesus is not the chief matter in this Lesson, and few will find time to enter on it. But an effective conclusion may be made by contrasting his fearless words to the great rulers of the Jews, whom he would not baptize because they would not repent, and his refusal to baptize Jesus because

He did not need repentance: "I have need to be baptized of Thee".

Much has been written on John. Mr. Smith's sermon in this number will reward careful reading. Very full is Reynolds' *John the Baptist*, one of the Congregational Union Lectures, and well worth reading. But the greatest of all writings on this subject is Edward Irving's series of discourses, to be found in vol. ii. of his Collected Works.

IV.

February 23.—Luke iv. 1-13.

The Temptation of Jesus.

Let us keep the golden text well in view; for the subject is very great, and very hard to make human and real to the children. It is Heb. ii. 18: "In that He Himself hath suffered, being tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted". Deeper in their minds than the manner of His temptation will be *why* He was tempted at all, and we cannot get beyond that answer.

Dr. Westcott says, in his new *Commentary on Hebrews*, that the thought of this verse is that "the range of Christ's sympathy is as wide as His experience". Therefore, in order to sympathise with us in *our* temptations, He must needs Himself be tempted.

In teaching the Temptation, *our* temptation will be to discuss profitless matters, such as the personality of the devil. Let us resist it.

He was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. St. Mark says, more strongly: "Immediately the Spirit driveth Him forth into the wilderness". There was a purpose, a divine purpose, in the Temptation, and it was urgent. He was led to be tempted by the devil. So it was permitted to Satan to tempt Job (read Job. i.) and to sift Simon Peter and his companions (see Luke xxii. 31, 32). It is sin that makes it possible; God permits it in order to get rid of sin.

1. After forty days' fasting came the first personal temptation. It was directed to the body. Turn the stones into bread. Why not? Because Jesus came not to be ministered unto (even by Himself), but to minister. It would have been gratifying an appetite at the expense of His "work". Besides, He had no fear for food; God will see to that; His work was to wait at present. "My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work."

2. The next temptation was directed to the mind, to the desire for power, to human ambition. On a high mountain, the devil offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world as a possession. Now, this was what Jesus wanted, what He came for—that He might win the world for Himself. Why not now, therefore, without all the suffering, when He had the offer? Because He must win men by love, lead them away from sin, and that can only be by the power of the Cross. The gift of a man from the devil is a man yet in his sin. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me."

3. The third temptation, in St. Luke's order, is the subtlest of all. It is addressed to the Spirit of Jesus. From the pinnacle of the Temple the devil bids Him cast Himself down; He will not be hurt, for, "He shall give His angels charge over Thee" (Ps. xci. 11). "The devil

can cite Scripture for his purpose," says Shakespeare, thinking of this scene. It was a simple request to put God's promises to the test—to show His own absolute trust. But the deepest trust is to do the work God has given us to do, however humble it may be, and be ready for higher service when He opens up the opportunity.

"Courage, brother, do not stumble,

Though thy path be dark as night:

There's a star to guide the humble,

Trust in God and do the right."

So even Jesus acted. He *was* God's Son, and would be kept by His angels from harm if driven into danger, as when the people of Nazareth tried to cast Him over the cliff. But even He must not wantonly run into danger merely to prove His trust in God. In man that is not faith, but foolhardiness. The Son of Man will be no example of what is really blind superstition and mistrust. He will not tempt the Lord His Father.

The better the teacher knows this great subject the better he will teach it. The book to read is Ullmann's *Sinlessness of Jesus*. Mr. Barrett's little book on the Temptation in the Household Library of Exposition is a clear exposition of every step in the narrative.

The International Lessons.

QUESTIONS will be set monthly on the International Lessons. It is intended that they should serve as an Examination of each month's work after it is finished. Accordingly, the questions will be set upon the lessons of the previous month. The name, age, and address of the boy or girl must accompany the answers each time they are sent. Prizes will be given to successful Candidates every month.

REPORT FOR JANUARY.

Age under thirteen.

I. GEORGE G. OMAND, Nitshill, Glasgow.

Age under eighteen.

I. J. M. SMALL, 1 Charteris Street, Perth.

Subsequent Order :—J. K. C. (Aberdeen), N. L. (Dundee).

EXAMINATION ON THE LESSONS FOR JANUARY.

(Answers must be sent to the Editor, Kinneff, Bervie, N.B., by the 13th February.)

I.

Age under eighteen.

1. What was the position in the temple of the altar of incense?

2. State in order the chief thoughts in the Magnificat.

4. Write an explanatory note upon the following expressions in the Lesson for January 26 :—(a) By night, (b) good tidings; (c) on earth peace, goodwill toward men.

II.

Age under thirteen.

1. How was Zecharias occupied when the angel appeared?

2. Quote the first prophecy of Christ which the Bible contains.

3. Why was it good tidings that the angels told the shepherds?