THE SUNDAY SCHOOL.

Lesson X.—First Quarter, For March 6, 1910.

THE INTERNATIONAL SERIES.

Text of the Lesson, Matt. viii, 2-17. Memory Verses, 2, 3—Golden Text, Matt. viii, 17—Commentary Prepared by Rev. D. M. Stearns.

Dr. Scofield says in his notes on these chapters that the King, having in chapters v-vii declared the principles of the kingdom, makes proof in chapters viii and ix of his power to banish from the earth the consequences of sin and to control the elements of nature. He also says that the word "Lord" in verse 2 is used 663 times in the New Testament as the divine title of Jesus the Christ and is equivalent to the title "Adonai" in the Old Testament (Matt. iii, 3; iv, 7, 10; xxii, 43, 45). In future when quoting from these notes from his new edition of the Bible I will give his initials, C. I. S.

In speaking of the kingdom the Spirit says through the prophet, "The inhabitant shall not say I am sick; the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity;" "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (Isa. xxxiii, 24; xxxv, 10). The kingdom of heaven, according to Dan. ii, 44, being at hand in the person and presence of the king, as declared by John the Baptist, Jesus Himself and the apostles (chapters iii, 2; iv, 17; x, 7), the King declares His power by a manifestation of several features of the kingdom. As we contemplate the righteousness of the kingdom as set forth in chapters v to vii and then the actual condition of things as they are about us in the world it is certainly a coming down to a much lower level, but it is to lift people up by the power of the King and His kingdom, and the multitudes are ready to hear of such a kingdom. Every form of physical suffering is suggestive of some disease of the soul, but nothing is quite so strikingly suggestive of sin as leprosy, which is so fully described in Lev. xiii and xiv. Sin is at the root of all our troubles. Can this man who in His teaching claims to be God do anything with leprosy? This leper believes that He can, but is not certain that He will. How the reply of Jesus must have filled him with an indescribable joy, "I will; be thou clean!" But these words came with the touch of Jesus, and with the touch and the words came the cleansing and the health immediately, and the outcast could return to his home and friends as a well man. That he may not think that his healer is in any sense contrary to the law of Moses he is told to show himself to the priest and offer the gift commanded. Well may we sing, "Unto Him that loveth us and hath washed us from our sins in His own blood."

His fame is spreading (are we helping to make Him known?), and now it is a centurion from Capernaum who has a servant sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. Luke, who was a physician, says that the man was ready to die, so that he must have been very sick. He also tells us that this servant was dear unto him and also that first of all the elders of the Jews came to Jesus on his behalf, saying that the centurion was worthy, that he loved the Jews and had built them a synagogue (Luke vii, 1-5). Jesus knew the centurion, as He knows all men and needs no testimony from any one concerning anybody (John ii, 24, 25), and He knew him to be a man with no thought of his own worthiness (verse 8 and Luke vii, 6, 7). He said, "I will come and heal him," and He went with them. As He neared the house the centurion sent friends to say that he did not consider himself worthy to have Jesus enter under his roof; but, inasmuch as he knew what it meant to obey and be obeyed, if Jesus would only say the word he was sure that his servant would be healed. Jesus marveled at the man and said to those who followed, "Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith; no, not in Israel" (verse 10). His word for the centurion was, "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee," and those who had been sent, returning to the house, found the servant whole. Such faith on the part of a gentile led the Lord Jesus to speak of the kingdom into which many gentiles from all the world will enter, while many who think they are entitled to the kingdom will be shut out by their unbelief.

The next instance of His power is in the house of Simon Peter, whose wife's mother is sick of a fever, but just the touch of His hand dispels the fever, and she is seen ministering unto them. Sin paralyzes our bodies or consumes them with burning, destroying desire, but He who takes away the result of sin by being made sin for us can also deliver from every manifestation of sin to the intent that we may minister unto Him. At even He cast out evil spirits from many with His word and healed all that were sick and thus fulfilled a word in Isaiah, "Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses" (16, 17).

It is often asked, Is the health of the body included in the atonement? We reply that the same great sacrifice which takes away our sins makes us sure of a perfect body just like His risen body, which shall never again be weak or sick or old or die, but that will be in the kingdom. All of His power which is seen in bodies now is but a foretaste of that which will be fully seen when He comes.

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Religion and Common Sense

It has often seemed to us that the intensely practical quality of much of our Lord's teaching has been overlaid by attempts to read into his words mystery and hidden meanings which are not there. When he warns us against judging lest we be ourselves judged, he means precisely what he says. It is not so much that God will judge us, but men will; they will very promptly apply to us our self-established standard.

Now, no man can rightly object to this; but if we are not careful it may at times prove uncommonly awkward. Even when we say of another's act, "I should not have done that," we set up a much more difficult standard than we are conscious of. We cannot know till the test comes whether we shall stand firm or fall; and, in any event, the speculative judgment, from the out side, of any action involving the interplay of motives is a very different thing from being at the vortex of those conflicting motives and having to apply to them the decision of a sovereign will.

Then there is this other complication, which is even more serious. When we pass judgment on men we do so by comparing their actions with some ideal, secretly cherished in our inner thought, no doubt, but which may be far from realization in our outward conduct. But those who judge us take note not of unrealized ideals, but of conduct as manifest to them. Who of us is there who could not be thus put to shame? How far we are from what we would be! How little indeed can men guess from what we do the exalted standards toward which, as we fancy, we are striving! Would you, then, says the wise Teacher, avoid being brought too sharply face to face with the failures of your own life? Be gentle with the failures of others. Is it not likely that they, too, cherish secret ideals and vex themselves with self-reproach at falling so far short of them? Why add your gibes to their bitterness? Equally simple and practical is his advice concerning our dealing with God. "Ask and it shall be given you." This is no mortgaging of the bounty of heaven. He does not guarantee to us that God will give always precisely what we ask. Many a parent gives bread instead of cake, or fruit when candy has been asked for, or nothing at all, yet rejoices that his child has confidence in him and tells him of its wants. Everything possible was done by Jesus, both by precept and example, to establish terms of confidential intimacy between his Father and his brothers and sisters. Many of these have lost the consciousness of this relationship. God does not seem to them a Father. They are afraid of him or they are ashamed of themselves; and they hide their faces when he is near. Others have asked for a certain thing, and, not getting it, have remained embittered and sulking. Others still have held a dumb silence so long that they have come to feel that there are no ears to hear, and so they pray not at all.

With all of them Jesus reasons patiently. "You give to your children when they ask. You hear them and love them even when you cannot give. Why? Who put fatherlove into your hearts? And why had you rather your children should give expression to their wishes and their affection instead of receiving everything or wanting everything in glum silence?" The answers are self-evident. Against all quibblings about the impossibility of answer to prayer the heart rises up—"a man in wrath." We know better because we have felt better things.

"But," interposes the skeptic, "the order of nature is fixed. God could not, if he would, disturb it to please us or to grant our petitions." "Bosh" returns common sense. "The order of nature is no more fixed than is the door to the closet where the housemother keeps her preserves. Ordinarily the door is shut, and the baby cannot get at the sweets. But it has a latch which she can lift and hinges on which to open. So many a dead wall, to human eyes, is to God a door which He knows how to swing wide, that he may let the redeemed of the Lord go through."—Nashville Christian Advocate.

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A Dream

A good Christian lady, we are told once opened a home for crippled children. Among those who were received was a little boy three years old, who was a most frightful and disagreeable-looking child. The good lady did her best for him, but the child was so unpleasant in his ways that she could not bring herself to like him.

One day she was sitting on the veranda steps with the child in her arms. The sun was shining warm; the scent of the flowers, the chirping of the birds, and the buzzing of the insects lulled her into drowsiness. So, in a half-waking, half-dreaming state, the lady dreamed of herself as having changed places with the child, only she was, if possible, more foul and more disagreeable than he was. Over her she saw the Lord Jesus bending, looking intently and lovingly into her face, and yet with a sort of rebuke in it, as if he meant to say: "If I can love you, who are so full of sin, surely you ought for my sake to love that suffering child."

Just then the lady awoke with a start and looked into the face of the little boy who lay on her lap. He had waked up, too, and she expected to hear him begin to cry; but he looked up at her—poor little mite—very quietly and earnestly for a long time, and then she bent her face to his and kissed his forehead more tenderly than she had ever done before.

With a startled look in his eyes and a flush on his cheeks, the little boy, instead of crying, gave her back a sweeter smile than she had ever seen on his face before.

From that day forth a complete change came over the child. Young as he was, he had hitherto read the feeling of dislike and disgust in the faces of all who had approached him; but the touch of human love which now came into his life swept all the peevishness and ill nature away and woke him to a happier life.

Do you know that there is no power in this world so strong as the power of love? As some one has truly said, "love is the greatest thing in the world."—Evangelical Messenger.

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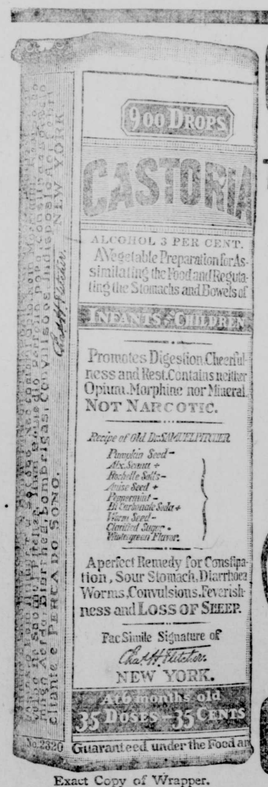

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