

ST. MATTHEW

*The Bible for
School and Home*

by J. Paterson Smyth

The Book of Genesis

Moses and the Exodus

Joshua and the Judges

The Prophets and Kings

*When the Christ Came:
The Highlands of Galilee*

*When the Christ Came:
The Road to Jerusalem*

St. Matthew

St. Mark

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J. Paterson Smyth

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I

This series of books is intended for two classes of teachers:

1. *For Teachers in Week Day and Sunday Schools.* For these each book is divided into complete lessons. The lesson will demand preparation. Where feasible there should be diligent use of commentaries and of any books indicated in the notes. *As a general rule* I think the teacher should not bring the book at all to his class if he is capable of doing without it. He should make copious notes of the subject. The lesson should be thoroughly studied and digested beforehand, with all the additional aids at his disposal, and it should come forth at the class warm and fresh from his own heart and brain. But I would lay down no rigid rule about the use of the Lesson Book. To some it may be a burden to keep the details of a long lesson in the memory; and, provided the subject has been very carefully studied, the Lesson Book, with its salient points carefully marked in coloured pencil, may be a considerable help. Let each do what seems best in his particular case, only taking care to satisfy his conscience that it is not done through

laziness, and that he can really do best for his class by the plan which he adopts.

2. *For Parents* who would use it in teaching their children at home. They need only small portions, brief little lessons of about ten minutes each night. For these each chapter is divided into short sections. I should advise that on the first night only the Scripture indicated should be read, with some passing remarks and questions to give a grip of the story. That is enough. Then night after night go on with the teaching, taking as much or as little as one sees fit.

I have not written out the teaching in full as a series of readings which could be read over to the child without effort or thought. With this book in hand a very little preparation and adaptation will enable one to make the lesson more interesting and more personal and to hold the child's attention by questioning. Try to get his interest. Try to make him talk. Make the lesson conversational. Don't preach.

II

HINTS FOR TEACHING

An ancient Roman orator once laid down for his pupils the three-fold aim of a teacher:

1. *Placere* (to interest).
2. *Docere* (to teach).
3. *Movere* (to move).

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1. To interest the audience (in order to teach them).
2. To teach them (in order to move them).
3. To move them to action.

On these three words of his I hang a few suggestions on the teaching of this set of Lessons.

1. Placere (to interest)

I want especially to insist on attention to this rule. Some teachers seem to think that to interest the pupils is a minor matter. It is not a minor matter and the pupils will very soon let you know it. Believe me, it is no waste of time to spend hours during the week in planning to excite their interest to the utmost. Most of the complaints of inattention would cease at once if the teacher would give more study to rousing their interest. After all, there is little use in knowing the facts of your subject, and being anxious about the souls of the pupils, if all the time that you are teaching, these pupils are yawning and taking no interest in what you say. I know some have more aptitude for teaching than others. Yet, after considerable experience of teachers whose lesson was a weariness to the flesh, and of teachers who never lost attention for a moment, I am convinced, on the whole, that the power to interest largely depends on the previous preparation.

Therefore do not content yourself with merely studying the teaching of this series. Read widely and freely. Read not only commentaries, but books that will

give local interest and colour—books that will throw valuable sidelights on your sketch.

But more than reading is necessary. You know the meaning of the expression, "*Put yourself in his place.*" Practise that in every Bible story, using your imagination, living in the scene, experiencing, as far as you can, every feeling of the actors. To some this is no effort at all. They feel their cheeks flushing and their eyes growing moist as they project themselves involuntarily into the scene before them. But though it be easier to some than to others, it is in some degree possible to all, and the interest of the lesson largely depends on it. I have done my best in these books to help the teacher in this respect. But no man can help another much. Success will depend entirely on the effort to "put yourself in his place."

In reading the Bible chapter corresponding to each lesson, I suggest that the teacher should read part of the chapter, rather than let the pupils tire themselves by "reading round." My experience is that this "reading round" is a fruitful source of listlessness. When his verse is read, the pupil can let his mind wander till his turn comes again, and so he loses all interest. I have tried, with success, varying the monotony. I would let them read the first round of verses in order; then I would make them read out of the regular order, as I called their names; and sometimes, if the lesson were long, I would again and again interrupt by reading a group of verses myself, making remarks as I went on. To lose their interest is fatal.

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I have indicated also in the lessons that you should not unnecessarily give information yourself. Try to question it *into* them. If you tell them facts which they have just read, they grow weary. If you ask a question, and then answer it yourself when they miss it, you cannot keep their attention. Send your questions around in every sort of order, or want of order. Try to puzzle them—try to surprise them. Vary the form of the question, if not answered, and always feel it to be a defeat if you ultimately fail in getting the answer you want.

2. *Docere (to teach)*

You interest the pupil in order that you may *teach*. Therefore teach definitely the Lesson that is set you. Do not be content with interesting him. Do not be content either with drawing spiritual teaching. Teach the facts before you. Be sure that God has inspired the narration of them for some good purpose.

When you are dealing with Old Testament characters, do not try to shirk or to condone evil in them. They were not faultless saints. They were men like ourselves, whom God was helping and bearing with, as He helps and bears with us, and the interest of the story largely depends on the pupil realizing this.

In the Old Testament books of this series you will find very full chapters written on the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the election of Jacob, the Sun standing still, the slaughter of Canaanites, and other such subjects. In connection with these I want to say something that

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especially concerns teachers. Your pupils, now or later, can hardly avoid coming in contact with the flippant scepticism so common nowadays, which makes jests at the story of the sun standing still, and talks of the folly of believing that all humanity was condemned because Eve ate an apple thousands of years ago. This flippant tone is "in the air." They will meet with it in their companions, in the novels of the day, in popular magazine articles on their tables at home. You have, many of you, met with it yourselves; you know how disturbing it is; and you probably know, too, that much of its influence on people arises from the narrow and unwise teaching of the Bible in their youth. Now you have no right to ignore this in your teaching of the Bible. You need not talk of Bible difficulties and their answers. You need not refer to them at all. But teach the truth that will take the sting out of these difficulties when presented in after-life.

To do this requires trouble and thought. We have learned much in the last fifty years that has thrown new light for us on the meaning of some parts of the Bible; which has, at any rate, made doubtful some of our old interpretations of it. We must not ignore this. There are certain traditional theories which some of us still insist on teaching as God's infallible truth, whereas they are really only human opinions about it, which may possibly be mistaken. As long as they are taught as human opinions, even if we are wrong, the mistake will do no harm. But if things are taught as God's infallible truth, to be believed on peril of doubting God's Word, it may do grave mischief, if in after-life the pupil find

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them seriously disputed, or perhaps false. A shallow, unthinking man, finding part of his teaching false, which has been associated in his mind with the most solemn sanctions of religion, is in danger of letting the whole go. Thus many of our young people drift into hazy doubt about the Bible. Then we get troubled about their beliefs, and give them books of Christian evidences to win them back by explaining that what was taught them in childhood was not *quite* correct, and needs now to be modified by a broader and slightly different view. But we go on as before with the younger generation, and expose them in their turn to the same difficulties.

Does it not strike you that, instead of this continual planning to win men back from unbelief, it might be worth while to try the other method of not exposing them to unbelief? Give them the more careful and intelligent teaching at first, and so prepare them to meet the difficulties by-and-by.

I have no wish to advocate any so-called "advanced" teaching. Much of such teaching I gravely object to. But there are truths of which there is no question amongst thoughtful people, which somehow are very seldom taught to the young, though ignorance about them in after-life leads to grave doubt and misunderstanding. Take, for example, the gradual, progressive nature of God's teaching in Scripture, which makes the Old Testament teaching as a whole lower than that of the New. This is certainly no doubtful question, and the knowledge of it is necessary for an intelligent study of

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Scripture. I have dealt with it where necessary in some of the books of this series.

I think, too, our teaching on what may seem to us doubtful questions should be more fearless and candid. If there are two different views each held by able and devout men, do not teach your own as the infallibly true one, and ignore or condemn the other. For example, do not insist that the order of creation must be accurately given in the first chapter of Genesis. You may think so; but many great scholars, with as deep a reverence for the Bible as you have, think that inspired writers were circumscribed by the science of their time. Do not be too positive that the story of the Fall *must be* an exactly literal narrative of facts. If you believe that it is I suppose you must tell your pupil so. But do not be afraid to tell him also that there are good and holy and scholarly men who think of it as a great old-world allegory, like the parable of the Prodigal Son, to teach in easy popular form profound lessons about sin. Endeavor in your Bible teaching “to be thoroughly truthful: to assert nothing as certain which is not certain, nothing as probable which is not probable, and nothing as more probable than it is.” Let the pupil see that there are some things that we cannot be quite sure about, and let him gather insensibly from your teaching the conviction that truth, above all things, is to be loved and sought, and that religion has never anything to fear from discovering the truth. If we could but get this healthy, manly, common-sense attitude adopted now in teaching the Bible to young people, we should, with

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God's blessing, have in the new generation a stronger and more intelligent faith.

3. *Movere (to move)*

All your teaching is useless unless it have this object: to move the heart, to rouse the affections toward the love of God, and the will toward the effort after the blessed life. You interest in order to teach. You teach in order to move. *That* is the supreme object. Here the teacher must be left largely to his own resources. One suggestion I offer: don't preach. At any rate, don't preach much lest you lose grip of your pupils. You have their attention all right while their minds are occupied by a carefully prepared lesson; but wait till you close your Bible, and, assuming a long face, begin, "And now, boys," etc. and straightway they know what is coming, and you have lost them in a moment.

Do not change your tone at the application of your lesson. Try to keep the teaching still conversational. Try still in this more spiritual part of your teaching to question into them what you want them to learn. Appeal to the judgment and to the conscience. I can scarce give a better example than that of our Lord in teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan. He first interested His pupil by putting His lesson in an attractive form, and then He did not append to it a long, tedious moral. He simply asked the man before Him, "Which of these three *thinkest thou?*"—i.e., "What do you think about it?" The interest was still kept up. The man, pleased at the appeal to his judgment, replied promptly, "He that

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showed mercy on him;” and on the instant came the quick rejoinder, “Go, and do thou likewise.” Thus the lesson ends. Try to work on that model.

Now, while forbidding preaching to your pupils, may I be permitted a little preaching myself? This series of lessons is intended for Sunday schools as well as week-day schools. It is of Sunday-school teachers I am thinking in what I am now about to say. I cannot escape the solemn feeling of the responsibility of every teacher for the children in his care. Some of these children have little or no religious influence exerted on them for the whole week except in this one hour with you. Do not make light of this work. Do not get to think, with good-natured optimism, that all the nice, pleasant children in your class are pretty sure to be Christ’s soldiers and servants by-and-by. Alas! for the crowds of these nice, pleasant children, who, in later life, wander away from Christ into the ranks of evil. Do not take this danger lightly. Be anxious; be prayerful; be terribly in earnest, that the one hour in the week given you to use be wisely and faithfully used.

But, on the other hand, be very hopeful too, because of the love of God. He will not judge you hardly. Remember that He will bless very feeble work, if it be your best. Remember that He cares infinitely more for the children’s welfare than you do, and, therefore, by His grace, much of the teaching about which you are despondent may bring forth good fruit in the days to come. Do you know the lines about “The Noisy Seven”?—

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“I wonder if he remembers—

Our sainted teacher in heaven—
The class in the old grey schoolhouse,
Known as the ‘Noisy Seven’?

“I wonder if he remembers

How restless we used to be.
Or thinks we forget the lesson
Of Christ and Gethsemane?

“I wish I could tell the story

As he used to tell it then;
I’m sure that, with Heaven’s blessing,
It would reach the hearts of men.

“I often wish I could tell him,

Though we caused him so much pain
By our thoughtless, boyish frolic,
His lessons were not in vain.

“I’d like to tell him how Willie,

The merriest of us all,
From the field of Balaclava
Went home at the Master’s call.

“I’d like to tell him how Ronald,

So brimming with mirth and fun,
Now tells the heathen of India
The tale of the Crucified One.

“I’d like to tell him how Robert,

And Jamie, and George, and ‘Ray,’
Are honoured in the Church of God—
The foremost men of their day.

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“I’d like, yes, I’d like to tell him
 What his lesson did for me;
And how I am trying to follow
 The Christ of Gethsemane.

“Perhaps he knows it already,
 For Willie has told him, maybe,
That we are all coming, coming
 Through Christ of Gethsemane.

“How many besides I know not
 Will gather at last in heaven,
The fruit of that faithful sowing,
 But the sheaves are already seven.”

INTRODUCTION TO ST. MATTHEW

Two thoughts have been prominent in writing these Lessons on St. Matthew's Gospel. It may be well to indicate them here.

I

The first is the thought of Christ's "Kingdom of God" as a sort of colony of Heaven down here on earth. A leading idea of ancient Rome was that of the founding of colonies throughout the world, whose laws should be the laws of Rome, and whose citizens should have the same duties and privileges as the citizens of the Imperial City. An idea something like this runs through the New Testament references to the founding of the "Kingdom of God," and especially in St. Matthew's Gospel, which is preëminently the "Gospel of the Kingdom." These Lessons on St. Matthew are, therefore, written with the central thought that our Lord's aim for His "Kingdom" was that it should be a sort of "colony" of Heaven to be founded on earth—a colony whose laws should be the laws of Heaven, whose subjects should be obedient to the authority of Heaven's King; and whose future should be in the perfect Kingdom of Heaven above.

Try to carry on this thought, which will be suggested

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to you all through by the titles of the Lessons. The children can easily be taught to get hold of it. Think of the Roman colony at Philippi, whose citizens so identified themselves with the far-off Imperial City, rejecting “customs not lawful for us to receive or to observe, being Romans” (Acts xvi. 21). Think of St. Paul’s teaching about the colony of the Kingdom of Heaven to these same Philippians, so proud of being citizens of Imperial Rome—“Our citizenship is in Heaven” (Philippians iii. 20, R.V.). Try to press on the children this thought of the Kingdom of God on earth as a colony of Heaven. There are “customs not lawful for us to receive or observe, being members of the Kingdom of God.” Try to teach them the real, practical religion implied in being members of that Kingdom. The thought is worked out more fully in Lesson III.

II

The second thought is this: that in order that the children may learn to love and trust our blessed Lord, it is above all things necessary that they should get to KNOW HIM; to become acquainted with Him in the same sense as one gets to know and become acquainted with a human friend. It is little use to tell them of the *duty* of loving or trusting Him. We can never love or trust anybody as a duty. We have learned to trust our dearest friends simply by *knowing* them, by letting their character reveal itself till we could no longer withhold our trust. That is the only way of learning to love or trust anybody, God or man.

Therefore must it be the prominent object in

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teaching the Gospel story that the child should insensibly be “acquainting himself with God,” learning God’s character, getting into touch with the heart of Jesus Christ. The events of the history, however interesting, must never obscure this. The purpose of every lesson must be to show His tenderness, His unselfishness, His patience, His love; taking care, in the proper places, to emphasize also His sterner side: His anger at hypocrisy; His indignant championship of the little ones; His sensitiveness to pain, and yet His calm courage in facing pain for others’ sake.

Do not worry the child with demands for admiration of these qualities. Do not keep telling him that he ought to love and admire, etc. Only pray for grace to present the Christ-character aright. Have faith in the power of that character to win all you desire.

Which of us has not often prayed for more love and trust in Christ, and more enthusiasm about Him? We know that we could love—aye, love enthusiastically—such a man if He lived in our midst to-day, and IF WE KNEW HIM intimately, as we know our closest friend. Therefore, surely, the highest thing we can do for the children is to help them to *know* Him while their hearts are young and susceptible. It is the only thing that matters much—thus knowing Christ. It is good to know obscure prophecies, and understand Bible difficulties, and good to have clear views about many theological dogmas; but all are of minor importance to the great object of the study of the Bible—to “KNOW THEE, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent.”

LESSON I

THE COMING OF THE KING

St. Matthew I. 18 to end, and II.

Take care to begin solemnly with the thought of Christ's Godhead and pre-existence. Divide the Lesson, for clearness, into four sections, as indicated. Show the class in Bible that section i. 18-25, is about the Miraculous Birth; the next (ii. 1-12) about visit of Wise Men; and so on.

§ 1. The Preparation

The most interesting and wonderful story in the world. But to keep up its interest and its wonder, two things are necessary. (1) We must exert our imaginations to picture vividly the scenes, and try to live in them, as it were, so as to escape the deadness which comes from knowing the story already. But also (2) we must take care in our vivid picturing not to become too familiar, not to think of "the Boy Jesus" as lightly as we should think of a boy in the next street. Must remind ourselves of His being God, and of solemn meaning of the Miraculous Birth—God becoming manifest in the flesh.

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If writing your life, what first? Birth. Yes, that is beginning of you. Is that so of our Lord? (John xvii. 5.) Millions of ages before the world was—so far back that brain reels at the thought—still He was there. He was God. Was He at Creation? John i. 1-3. And at the sad Fall which we thought of recently? Was He sorry? Then began His promises that He would come and help up the poor world again. First promise? Genesis iii. 15. Explain. Then tell me any of the promises to Abraham which we had lately? (Genesis xii. 2, 3; xxii. 15-18; xxviii. 14; etc.); to David? (Psalms ii. 6; xlv. 3, 4; lxii.); to Isaiah? (ix. 6, 7; xxxii. 1); to other prophets? (Jeremiah xxiii. 5, 6; Micah v. 2-5; Daniel ii. 44; Zechariah ix. 9; etc.) Only time just to remind of them. So for thousands of years the world went on, and still He did not come. But the world was waiting. And God was preparing all the time, watching the world, getting all things ready. At last “fulness of time come” (Galatians iv. 4), when our story to-day begins. All the separate little nations welded into one great Roman empire, with its one language; with its splendid roads reaching everywhere from Rome; with the people getting worse and more in need of the Christ. Everything ready for founding of His Kingdom. And people seemed to feel that the King must be coming. Everywhere amongst the Jews an excited expectancy. (See Luke ii. 25, 26, 38; Acts xxvi. 7; etc.) And even some of the learned heathen, too, looking forward in a puzzled way to the coming of some great One. Then opens St. Matthew’s story in ch. i. 18-25, told to emphasize that Christ was not of human birth.

§ 2. *The Miraculous Coming*

Simple, beautiful story. A betrothed couple in country village of Nazareth. Ever see village carpenter's shop? Where? Describe? Like that, a village workshop in the Nazareth street, and a strong, broad-shouldered carpenter working at his bench with saw and hammer and chisel, making tables and chairs, and ploughs and cattle-yokes for the country-people. Working hard and joyfully to prepare a new home. Why? Engaged to be married soon. To whom? Living in other end of village with her mother, working in the house, making bread, and spinning, and drawing water from the well with other village girls in the evenings. Don't you think she was very beautiful? At any rate, surely beautiful in soul, gentle and modest, loving and religious.

And Joseph the carpenter loved her dearly. I think he was older than she was, and he was very tender to her, and liked to watch her passing, and liked to think of the little home he was making for her. And it must have been pleasant to her to meet him, and to hear him talk of all his brave hopes and plans for their future. I think, too, they cared so much for religion, that they often talked of God's promise of the Messiah. And I can imagine the girl going home after her talks, and kneeling down at her bedside to pray for God's blessing on her lover's life and her own. Little she dreamed how wonderful would be the answer.

Then came a day that she could never forget.

One day, just before St. Matthew's story begins—perhaps at prayer—suddenly a wonderful visitor. Who?

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(Luke i. 26.) What did he announce? Think of the awe, and astonishment, and trembling joy. She to be the mother of the Messiah that all the nation hoped for. Fancy her excitement! Wanting to tell someone. Whom did she tell? (Luke i. 39.) Perhaps angel did not wish her to tell Joseph, and that she had to carry her secret in her own wondering heart, only talking of it to God in her prayers. By-and-by God revealed it to Joseph. How? Very joyful and comforting, but surely very solemn too. Messiah coming. Emmanuel—God with us. And this stupendous miracle should be through his affianced wife. He was to take her home, and live in reverent awe with her, and be God's guardian for the little Child when born. What was he to call Him? Why? (v. 21.) Yes. Not merely save from pain, or unhappiness, or hell-fire—that, too—but, most important of all, "from their sins." With God that is more important than all the rest. Therefore, how can one know whether he is being saved by Lord Jesus? If he sees that he is getting help to conquer meanness, and selfishness, and badness of every kind, and to grow noble, and strong, and unselfish, and lovable—then he sees he is being saved. That is God's meaning of salvation. Will He do that for anybody who comes? That was what He came for. "Him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out."

You remember St. Luke's story of the birth-day of our Lord (Luke ii.). Angels again. It seems heaven so overflowing with joyful excitement that the angels could not keep still. Joy for what? God's generous love to poor men and women who had sinned. Do angels care? (Luke xv. 10.) I suppose these angels had seen the

Creation, and grieved over Fall; and then watched and waited all these centuries, never growing older. Now the joy of telling of God's generous goodness to the shepherds watching in the fields.

§ 3. *The Wise Men from the East*

Some other people watching hundreds of miles away in the East that night? Perhaps in Daniel's far-off land of Chaldea. "Wise Men," magi—astronomers, like Daniel. What did they see? We really know nothing further about this star; must have been some miraculous light low down, since no ordinary star could point out a house. All we know is that God in some way taught these wise astronomers about the coming Messiah, and then, since they were eager to find Him, guided them by this star. Perhaps they lived in Daniel's country, or Balaam's country, and knew their prophecies; or, perhaps, Jews living there told them of expected Messiah.

At any rate, they heard of Him, and were eager to find Him; and so God revealed, as He always does to eager souls, how to find Him. They were heathens, Gentiles—not Jews. Is it not nice to learn that God was teaching heathens and Gentiles, while the Jews thought He only cared for themselves? The Jews always thought that. In Old Testament they thought that God cared nothing about Canaanites or Ninevites, or any heathen. Yet you remember. God had Melchizedek amongst Canaanites; and Jethro, and Balaam, and Job, and Jonah were His teachers of religion to other heathen races. Christian people sometimes think like Jews; but it is

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wrong. God is Father of all—Christ is Brother of all; and “in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is acceptable unto Him.” That is why God is so desirous that we should bring the light of Gospel to the poor heathen, whom He is watching over with as much care as He watches over us.

So they came. Away, away, over mountains and deserts, on their camels, with the rich, barbaric trappings, and bearing their costly gifts. Remember pictures of them on Christmas cards—three kings: Gaspar, Melchior, Balthazar. Cologne Cathedral claims to have their tombs and their skulls; but really nobody knows anything of them except what this chapter tells. At last, after long weeks or months, they arrive at Jerusalem. Imagine them, with their jingling trappings and foreign appearance, riding in and asking everyone they met—what? I suppose they expected to see banners, and rejoicing, and illuminations everywhere, and all men talking of the young king. Was it so? No; though they had the prophecies of Scripture, and professed to expect Him, no one seemed to care. Like many to-day. Imagine poor blacks coming eagerly to you, as you leave Sunday school to-day, asking you about the good news of Christ. Should you tell them with joy, or should you be puzzled or indifferent? Why so? Is not there good news about Christ? Do you know it? Are you glad? These Jerusalem Bible-readers stared, and wondered, and chattered, and crowded around the strangers till they must have grown quite discouraged about their quest. At last Herod, in his white palace, heard of it. Was he glad? Why? What did he do? What

did the priests and scribes tell him? What prophet wrote it? Then Herod thought of a very clever, crooked trick. What? Wise men, not accustomed to meanness and scheming, did not see the trick; thought Herod a very good, kind king. What questions did he ask? Why? So he sent them away with kind words, and they promised what? What was his object? What an utter fool that old king was! What a fool everybody is who tries to oppose God! Could all the kings of the world put together do it? Like so many little children opposing an express train.

Tell me rest of the story of the Wise Men. Yes. God guided them, and rewarded all their faith and all their exertions; and they found the Lord Jesus, and worshipped Him. That is always result of earnest seeking. How did they show their devotion to Him? Yes. Gave Him the best and costliest things they had. They were the first Gentiles who found the Lord. We are the later Gentiles finding Him. How must we show our devotion? Same way. Offer what? The best we have—of money, of brains, of strength, of influence, etc. No real worship of Him except thus. All else is mockery. On what Church festival do we celebrate this visit of Wise Men?

§ 4. *The Holy Innocents*

How did Herod's trick succeed? (ii. 12.) Was he vexed? Yes, and frightened. Thought they must be plotting for the new king. But he thought of another way to destroy Christ? Yes. Fancy the officer getting such a brutal order—how he would hate the old tyrant

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who had already killed his own queen and three sons. Yet he obeyed; called out the soldiers, and sent them to Bethlehem.

Think of the little village children running to meet them, and looking at their gay dresses and beautiful horses. Surely some of the soldiers must have hated the terrible task. That night the whole village was in uproar—mothers shrieking and grappling with the murderers, and the poor little dead and dying boys¹ lying in the streets. And little use it was to that cruel old wretch who ordered it to save his throne. For the Babe Jesus was safe, in spite of it all. Where? How? And in a few weeks Herod was dead himself, and summoned before his God. He thought himself wise and clever. Was he? Was it worth while doing all this wickedness? Is it ever worth while doing wickedness? What would have been the truest wisdom for Herod? To follow the little promptings of good that God sends to all men, even to him—to try to be unselfish and loving, and make others happy, and never mind about himself or his throne. That is always the truest wisdom. Always keep “never minding” about yourself, and following highest and most unselfish instincts. Then you are surely on God’s side, and all will be well.

Think of the poor little boys—the first who ever died for Jesus’ sake. They did not know; but surely God did not on that account let them lose by it. There is a beautiful picture of the Triumph of the Innocents,

¹(*Ch.* ii. 16.) All the “*male* children” (*see* R.V.). So the massacre would not be a very great one. Not many boys under two in Bethlehem.

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where these little children of Bethlehem, after their death, are pictured, wreathed and twined in beautiful flowers, crowding round the Child Jesus as he was carried away into Egypt; and Jesus is stretching out His little hands to them in glad, loving welcome. It is only a painter's fancy. But it teaches surely what is true of every child who dies for the Lord Jesus, like the poor black boys in Uganda a few years since, and of every child, too, who lives for Jesus, as you, I trust, are going to do.

LESSON II

HOW THE KING WAS CROWNED, AND WENT FORTH TO BATTLE

St. Matthew III. and IV. to v. 12.

§ 1. Childhood and Youth

Remind briefly of last Sunday's story. How old was the Lord Jesus then? How old in to-day's story? (Luke iii. 23.) Notice briefly what happened meantime. How the little Child grew up, child-like, natural, like the others, only more brave and unselfish and lovable. How He played with the other village children in the market-place. When He was a grown man, He thinks of one of the old games—a sort of “weddings and funerals” game (Matthew xi. 16, 17). How He was obedient and helpful at home (Luke ii. 51). How He went to village school, and sat on the floor with all the others, and learned whole pages of the Bible by heart. That was the usual lesson-book. Interesting scene in Longfellow's *Golden Legend*, the Rabbi ben-Israel's school:—

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“Come hither, Judas Iscariot,
Say if thy lesson thou hast got

. . .

Now little Jesus, the carpenter’s Son,
Let us see how Thy task is done,” etc.

How at twelve years old He went up to Passover (Luke ii. 42), probably met His cousin John, and sat with him at Passover feast, where the youngest child—perhaps Himself—had to say the words, “What mean ye by this service?” and the oldest man arose to explain “It is the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover,” etc. (Exodus xii. 27). Don’t you think great thoughts would begin to stir in the Child as He wondered about that Passover, which for all these centuries had pointed to Himself—as He saw the Holy City and the white-robed priests and choir-boys, and bowed low in the grand cathedral worship of the Temple? How He came back and was bound to Joseph’s trade; and when Joseph died, He had to support His widowed mother, and became known as “Jesus the carpenter,” to whom the country-people came to buy chairs and boxes and cattle-yokes, as they did to Joseph before. I like to think of His having to work, and buy, and sell, like ordinary men, making all work and trade holy. But all the while the great thoughts were deepening—the Divine passion for helping others and sacrificing Himself. How troubled and perplexed He would be about the sick and cripples, and especially the wicked—cruel, selfish boys, and girls, and men!

And the clergy and teachers not much good. Not teaching love and self-sacrifice, but mumbling old, tedious rules, and fighting over little theological

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differences, and “not touching with one of their fingers” the people’s burdens of body, and heart, and brain. I can fancy all the pain in His heart, and the furrows on His face, as He got older. I can fancy the lonely boy stealing out at night into the hills to unburden His heart, and pray for God’s blessing on the poor world, and how Mary would wonder as she saw Him come in with the strange, earnest light in his eyes.

But He had to restrain Himself till his time was come that He should go forth to help for all eternity the world’s troubles, by founding His “Kingdom of God” for the blessing of men.

§ 2. *The Herald of the King*

Now we come to story of to-day. Jesus is thirty years old, and all the country is ringing with the rumour about his cousin John. The Nazareth people coming to the workshop can talk of nothing else. “A great prophet.” “Elijah come back.” “All the people crowding to him,” etc. For hundreds of years no prophet. No wonder they ask: “Is God coming back as of old?” “Is Messiah coming?” “Why this prophet now?” Could you answer them? (Luke i. 76.) What prophecy did John quote? (Matthew iii. 3.) He was to prepare the way for Christ—the voice crying before the King, like the Eastern herald that ran before the royal procession, calling out, “The King! the King!”

Our Lord must have felt now that He can stay no longer. His time is come. Patiently for thirty years He had waited. Now the Divine longing must have its

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way. He must go out to lift up the poor world. So one day, in His simple dress, He suddenly appears in the crowd listening to John at Jordan. Describe scene before Him. What was John like? The crowd? Listening, do you think? Ah! they had to listen there. Whenever a great soul like that, full of enthusiasm for his message, thinking not of advancement or praise, or fine clothes, giving up everything in his eager excitement to rouse men to righteousness—people can't help listening. What else were they doing? (v. 6.) How our Lord's heart must have been throbbing as He watched the preacher! Very gentle preacher, was he? Some of the great rulers and teachers came. Did he speak more gently to them because they were great people? (v. 7.) Did he turn them off? No. But insists on what? (v. 8.) Yes; righteousness, reality. No talk about their feelings or religious notions, nor their belonging to Jewish Church. No, said John, the righteous life is the one supreme thing. Be real, be earnest, be true. Bring forth good fruit, or else what? Don't you think John was an awkward sort of preacher for hypocrites, and humbugs, and sentimental talkers about religion?

John's two great subjects? (vv. 2, 3.) (1) Repent; (2) The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Meaning of Kingdom of Heaven we shall see in next Lesson. But a kingdom at any rate must have a king. Whom? So the whole of John's sermon led up to proclaiming the King. How? (vv. 11, 12.) And the mighty prophet-preacher, so stern and high in his tone to the great people of earth, bows lowly and humble as he thinks about the coming King, "the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to

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unloose” (Luke iii. 16). And show how humbly he compares his own gifts and power of helping people with those of Christ (v. 11).

All this time Jesus was in the crowd, quietly awaiting His turn, standing in his simple country dress by the river. Now He comes down. Did He come confessing His sins, like the rest? Why not? What did John say? Do you think John knew Him to be the Christ? (John i. 33.) But he knew his cousin as the truest noblest heart on earth, in whom no man had ever seen meanness, or selfishness, or any sin. So felt unworthy to baptize Him. Now tell me of baptism, and the wonderful event, the crowning of the King from Heaven? Did the crowd see it? We don't know. Did John? (John i. 33.) Astonished, struck dumb with reverence and awe, he saw his young carpenter cousin claimed as God. Like as if, when Peter the Great was working in an English dockyard in disguise, the Court of Russia should suddenly appear and crown him amid his workmen-companions. That is why I call this “the Crowning of the King,” as His great life-work began. Began with a battle.

§ 3. *The Battle and Victory*

Evening come. Crowd departed. John has retired to his cave in awe and wonder. And Jesus departed, too, alone. Where? Away, away out into wild desert country. Could not rest. Great thoughts and yearnings stirring in His soul. His whole life stirred to its foundation by this wondrous scene. The Spirit of God pressing powerfully on Him. He must be away, alone in communion with

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His Father. Away, away through the starry night, into the trackless desert, not thinking of danger, nor of the wild beasts, nor of hunger, nor of anything, but the great, wonderful thoughts that are filling His soul. And so rapt is He in His great future, and His communion with God, and His delight in the self-sacrifice for men, that He forgets even to eat—for how long? People in great mental excitement often forget hunger and pain for a time.

But when excitement over, there comes terrible reaction; feels weak, and tired, and despondent. Very hard time to resist temptation. This time, therefore, chosen by Satan for his most powerful attacks. Why attack Christ? If he can make Him sin, it will spoil His power. Whether Satan came as a great black angel of evil, or whether visible at all, we don't know. Do you remember story of his first coming to man? (Genesis iii.) Did he ever come to you? Visible? How? Perhaps like that to Jesus. We don't know. Perhaps St. Matthew did not know. Who must have given account of the Temptation? Why? Because no one else knew but He. And whether the tempter visible or not, Christ says he was the devil. Think of this when you feel him tempting you. A great, real, wicked devil. Don't say, "I feel bad desires and thoughts," but say, "I am tempted of the devil," like our Lord, and rise up and fight him bravely in the strength which our Lord will give you.

Remember, too, Jesus had to fight him *as a man*. He had "emptied Himself." There would have been no need to show that as God He could triumph over Satan. But He had come down to our level as our brother, and

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would take no advantage that we could not have. Like an armoured knight of old, fighting in front of his peasant soldiers, but putting away his armour, and shield, and horse, and fighting just as they, to inspirit them.

What was the first temptation? Could He do it? Was it a sore temptation? What harm would it have been? Because He was our brother, must fight like His brothers, and trust in God. Never use for His own gain the Divine power. Would be like the knight, when in danger, saving himself by putting on his armour, which his poor brethren could not have. No, He would trust in God; and into his mind at once flashed a verse, which perhaps He had learned in the old rabbi's village school. What was it? "Man shall not," etc. Good thing in temptation to know one's Bible. Then Satan, seeing His trust, very cunningly tries to tempt him that way.

Second temptation? Yes. "Trust God to keep you if you throw yourself off temple." Why should not He? Because it is only in the path of duty we may trust God. If anything be your duty, do it, even at risk of life, and trust God. But not if go into needless danger, doing your own will, to win admiration or recognition from others. What text quoted.

Third temptation? I don't quite understand how this could be a temptation. What did Jesus care about earthly glory, and money, and power? Perhaps this was a stupid blunder of Satan. He was very cunning and subtle; but low, degraded souls cannot understand high and noble souls. Very cunning, tricky, self-seeking man, who could "buy and sell" the wisest around him,

yet would be quite unable to understand an utterly noble, unselfish man, full of enthusiasm for God and self-sacrifice. And so would not know how to tempt such a one. Perhaps it was that. Or perhaps he thought Jesus so anxious to get the kingdoms to bless them, that He would be willing to “do evil that good might come.” Would He? What was the third answer from Scripture?

Then what happened? (v. 11.) Battle over, victory won. Did it ever happen with you? Try to make it happen, and you will learn that the devil is a bully and a coward. Like a bully at school, squaring up to a small boy to frighten him; but if small boy hits back, the bully runs away. So Satan (James iv. 7). It is a great delight to drive him off, one feels so glad, and proud, and thankful. Especially remember that the devil *leaves* us. He is not omnipresent, any more than omnipotent. Some think he is, and they lose heart in temptation, and say: “I may as well give in now as later, for this strain of temptation will be always pressing on me.” It is not so. The time of your sharpest temptation is “his hour and the power of darkness.” Remember that. Fight through it. And perhaps it will be days and days before a really fierce temptation comes again. Try it next time, and you will see how beautifully all our Lord’s fight was for your encouragement and example. The devil will leave you, and in the comfort and peace you will feel as if angels were come to minister unto you.