

ST. MARK

*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

YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS

ITHACA, NEW YORK

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ISBN: 978-1-63334-088-6

Yesterday's Classics, LLC
PO Box 339
Ithaca, NY 14851

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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

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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

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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.”

LETTER TO THE TEACHER

Very little preface is here required. Read over carefully Lesson II. on “THE KINGDOM OF GOD” before you begin your teaching. Try to work out for yourself the thoughts just sketched there in bare outline. All through the Gospel of St. Mark keep before you this thought of the “Kingdom of God” as the ideal ever present to the mind of our Blessed Lord—a colony of Heaven to be founded on earth, like the colonies of Rome founded throughout the ancient world—a colony whose laws should be the laws of Heaven; whose work and amusements should be according to the will of “The King;” whose subjects should be those who “suffer long, and are kind, who envy not, who vaunt not, who seek not their own;” and whose future should be in the perfect “Kingdom of God” above. 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 Heaven to these same Philippians, so proud of being citizens of Imperial Rome. “Our citizenship is in Heaven.” (Philippians iii. 20). 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

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or observe, being members of the Kingdom of God.” Try to teach them the real, practical religion implied in being members of that Kingdom. Teach them that Bible-reading, and Prayer, and Sacraments are not in themselves religion—the work of the Kingdom—but rather the *indispensable* source of strengthening and stimulating power for performing that religion, that work of “The Kingdom.” Show that the Incarnation, the Atonement, the coming of the Holy Ghost were all necessary parts of this ideal of Christ.

The story of the founding of the Church in the early chapters of the Acts is included as part of this book. We cannot say that the Church is the perfect embodiment of Christ’s ideal; but it is the best approach to it that humanity has attained. Like a sculptor trying to embody a very noble conception in very rough, intractable material, so is the Lord trying to embody His ideal in imperfect humanity. It is very rough, very imperfect; but it is in some degree embodying the conception, and growing more desirous of embodying it, we trust, as the ages go on. Try to make the children feel sympathy with this longing of their Master, to recognise all that they owe to Him, and to see their duty towards that Kingdom of His into which they came at Baptism. Let them think of Him as looking lovingly down upon their individual lives, watching eagerly to help them towards beautiful deeds, rejoicing in their every struggle toward the right, and thinking wistfully of the day when His desire shall be accomplished; when, in the blessed streets of the Kingdom above, “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.”

LETTER TO THE TEACHER

Thus may you help to teach your children real religion; not the religion of mere fruitless church-going; not the religion of mere emotions and excitements, which we hear so much of to-day, but the sound, manly, common-sense religion taught them in the *Church Catechism*, “to do my duty in that state of life unto which it hath pleased God to call me.”

LESSON I

INTRODUCTORY

St. Mark I. 1-13.

“The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”

(1) It is important to divide this Gospel clearly into Introduction, i. vv. 1-13; Part I, Christ’s public ministry in Galilee, ch. i.-x.; Part II, His ministry and death in Judæa, ch. x.-xvi. Mark those divisions in the children’s Bibles.

(2) In teaching the importance of the Church in God’s plan for the world, avoid all arrogant talk about our separated brethren. Try to impress the idea of a divinely guided Society of baptized people, who should all be one—that separations are weakening it and injuring it, and displeasing Christ. Our Church has been to blame as well as Dissenters. Our duty to ask Christ to help us to bring all together again, so that the sin of separation may cease, and the Church of God be strong and united, as He desires.

(3) The game of word-picturing here suggested, if not overdone, is very interesting to children. If the teacher has any vividness of imagination, he can hold

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them spell-bound, and can impart warmth and life and colour to the Bible story, that will make it most interesting to them.

§ 1. How were the Gospels written?

Meaning of “Gospel”? How many Gospels? One. How many separate accounts of it? Are all exactly the same? Why not? Illustrate four separate boys telling of an accident. Would they say exactly same things? Each tells from own point of view what struck him most. One notices something that another does not, etc. So different. But their stories in the main are the same. Show gain of four accounts of our Lord’s life and work. Like four pictures of Him from different points of view.

Which came first, the Church or the Bible? Which first, the telling or the writing of the Gospel story? Which would come first to-day in China? Of course, the Church comes first. The Lord first founded a Divine Society, and then through that Society gave the Divine Book. Men come first and tell the story of Christianity, and teach and baptize converts. Then after some years they begin to prepare written or printed Bible. Thus in China to-day. Thus also in early days. Gospels did not begin by Evangelist sitting down one day to compose his Gospel straight off, as we write books. The Gospels are just the stories told in their preaching by the apostles and disciples everywhere, and gathered together and written down after several years had passed. Every day St. Peter, St. Matthew, St. John, and other teachers sent

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by the Church were telling the stories of Christ's life. St. Matthew told it to Jews in Judæa; St. John to Gentiles at Ephesus. So told in different ways. Each told what he knew best, and what was most suited for his hearers. By constantly telling same things they got to tell them well—to leave out what was unimportant—to dwell on what was most powerful for touching men's hearts. Thus the guidance of the Holy Spirit was preparing for the writing of the Gospels.

The Gospel, therefore, was first *oral*, or spoken. Then people began to write down the separate stories, lest they should be forgotten. Probably many accounts. (See Luke i. 1-3.) But the greatest and best and most perfect were those four which we now have—the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John, written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and *chosen by the Church*, under His guidance, to be preserved and taught, while the other accounts gradually vanished away. Remember it was through the Church that God gave and preserved the Bible. Remember, then, that the Church of Christ is a very sacred thing, and very important to be kept in mind. It is God's appointed means of helping the world. It is the Divine Society founded by Christ. It existed many years before a word of the New Testament was written. It prepared the Gospels under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. It bore witness to them. It preserved them through all the ages. It taught them to the world. It was the instrument used by the Holy Ghost for helping men everywhere to the knowledge of Christ. As far as we can see, there would be no Bible if there were no Church. People nowadays

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forget the sacred position of the Church. They think it means separate individuals, not one Divine Society. They split it up into hundreds of different bodies, who will not worship together; and then they ask, Where is the Church? Some people don't believe in the Church or its mission at all. (*See Lesson on Acts II.*) They do not understand what grand purposes the Church has accomplished, and what grand purposes God has still for it. Be you careful to remember it. Do all you can firmly, lovingly, prayerfully, to heal its unhappy divisions, for its Master's sake.

§ 2. *Who was St. Mark?*

Would like to know something of writer of this Gospel. Look at Acts xii. 12. We hear of Mary, the mother of Mark, who had a house in Jerusalem. She seems to have been a person of some means and influence, whose house was a meeting-place for the early Christians in those dangerous days. Probably the Lord Jesus used to go there. Perhaps Lord's Supper instituted in its upper room. Most probably it was the upper room where the Pentecost miracle took place. So the boy brought up in a Christian home. Knew the chief men of the Church. We read that Paul and Barnabas quarrelled about this young Mark (Acts xv. 36-40). Yet he was with Paul afterwards at Rome (Colossians iv. 10; Philemon 24). But Peter seems his especial friend and spiritual father. Came straight to his house to tell of escape (Acts xii. 12). And long years afterwards mentions Mark affectionately as being with him (1 Peter v. 13): "Marcus, my son." Early

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Church writers soon after Apostles say that Mark was the “interpreter” of St. Peter—that he put down what Peter taught him of the life of the Lord. So that we might almost call this the Gospel of St. Peter. Pleasant to think of the aged Apostle talking so warmly to his young comrade about all the pleasant memories of the Lord, whom he so enthusiastically loved, and the young Marcus who, as a boy, had probably seen Jesus, and heard the people talk of Him in his mother’s house, writing down what Peter told him. Here is the account of a very early Christian named Papias, who is said to have been a hearer of St. John:—“Mark, having become Peter’s interpreter, wrote accurately all that Peter mentioned. He did not, however, record in order either the things said or done by Christ, for he neither heard the Lord nor followed Him, but subsequently followed Peter, who used to frame his teaching in accordance with the needs (of his hearers), but not as though making a methodic narrative of the Lord’s discourses. So Mark made no error in writing down some things as Peter narrated them.”

§ 3. *“The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ”*

To-day we have the introduction (ch. i. to v. 14). Then comes Part I. (chs. i. to x.)—an account of our Lord’s ministry in Galilee; and Part II.—His last visit to Jerusalem, with His death and resurrection. Repeat these divisions. Mark in Bible. Remember them. St. Mark seems a very eager, hurrying writer. He makes his stories, like pictures, very bright and clear, and interesting, and

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always every picture with Jesus in the midst. But he crowds them in so fast that we can hardly keep up with him. Like a magic lantern, where the pictures are run in very rapidly one after another. In chap. i. he has run in ten separate little pictures, each a perfect and beautiful little story in itself. (See Revised Version, where they are marked by separate paragraphs.) We have only time to look at the first three to-day, and see THE LORD PREPARING FOR HIS WORK (vv. 1-14). This portion is the "Introduction to the Gospel." Now shut your eyes, and let me throw the pictures upon the screen.

(a) First is thrown upon the screen—the picture of a wilderness land, with its gloomy rocks and trees, and a rapid river running between the green, reedy banks. There is a crowd of all sorts of people—soldiers, and publicans, and Scribes, and Pharisees—some with anxious looks, some with mocking sneer; and, above them all, a pale, earnest face, and thin, worn form, with a hairy robe and a leathern girdle about his loins. His eyes are flashing sternly; his speech is eager and passionate; he looks like an ancient prophet of God; he makes them think of "Elias, who was to come." And the gay courtiers of Herod, and the rough soldiers of the Empire, and the sneering Pharisees, and the proud Sadducees have to listen to his terrible threats and warnings against sin. He tells all who are sorry for their sins to come down into the river to be baptized, that God may forgive them, and help them to be good. But he says: "I am only a poor humble preacher; I am but preparing for the Great Coming One whom the

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prophets told you of. He will baptize you with the Holy Ghost." So ends the first picture.

(b) Now shut your eyes again for the next. Here picture after the same manner the baptism of Jesus; prepare your description carefully beforehand. Watch to see if the interest is kept up; if not, let the game of picturing stop. Otherwise, go rapidly on to the third picture.

(c) A dreary desert plain, with the wild beasts swarming about it, looking for their prey, yet passing peacefully and lovingly about the feet of their Lord. Make your picture at the close of the forty days of awful struggle, and temptation, and hunger, when He is pale and wearied with the strain; when the devil has departed, and the angels are ministering to Him. Take trouble to bring out the feeling of awe for the infinite purity and majesty of the Lord. John, before whom the greatest quailed, yet felt himself unworthy to loose the thong of His shoe, so wonderfully was he touched by that majesty of goodness—the fierce, wild beasts forgot their fierceness in His loving presence—the great, strong angels of God, who with a touch could destroy Jericho, were bowing at His feet, rejoicing to do Him service, and wondering that He should stoop to this poor life. What means it all? That the King of the strong angels—the Creator of all things—had come down to poor, humble, sinful men and women, to be their brother on earth, to save their souls, to help them to be good. "God so loved the world." (John iii. i6). Thus our Blessed Saviour prepared for His ministry. Next day we shall see Him fully engaged in it.

LESSON II

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

St. Mark I. 13-29.

“The Kingdom of God is at hand.”

The object of the teacher in this Lesson should be to leave a clear, definite impression as to the meaning of “the Kingdom of God.” It is most important to get true views about this—to get rid of the selfish thought that Christ lived and died only that I, and certain who believe as I do, should go to Heaven when we die. Teach them of Christ’s beautiful ideal—try to rouse their enthusiasm for it—to send them out with an impression of what Christ intended the Church to be. Probably the Lesson here is too long. But with deep, prayerful study of the subject, the teacher who is in earnest can leave the desired impression with fewer words. It might be well to question the children briefly on St. Mark’s seven pictures in the Lesson.

§ 1. *The Kingdom of God*

I want to start with a question which will need all

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your thinking to answer. What was the favourite, the constant, subject of our Lord's preaching? Almost all teachers who are capable of excitement and enthusiasm about their work, have some special pet subject—Temperance or Missions, or Housing of Poor, etc. about which they get most enthusiastic, always wanting to talk about it, always wanting to rouse us about it; every conversation, every sermon of theirs will somehow lead up to it. People say—Well, that man has Temperance, Missions, etc. on the brain. He can't talk of anything else!

We may reverently say our Lord, too, had one pet subject, one pet enthusiasm, the centre of all His teaching. Every sermon, every parable, referred to it. His whole life has the picture, the model, the revelation of it. It was the vision that filled up all His hopes, all His outlook into the future. What was it? Think. Try again: His very first sermon in this chapter was about it? (v. 15). What was it? Yes. **THE KINGDOM OF GOD**. In Concordance you find it nearly 100 times mentioned: *e.g.*, Mark i. 15; Luke iv. 43; viii., ix. 1 etc., etc.

Again, see parables—Kingdom of God like leaven—hid treasure—seed sown in a field, etc., etc. Main thought in them is the Kingdom of God. (Take trouble to learn and to impress on class that the Divine Reformer, like all the greatest of human reformers, was pre-eminently possessed with one great idea, and that idea was the Kingdom of God.)

§ 2. *What did he mean by it?*

You say He meant Heaven—a happy land to go to when we die? No, He did not. Most certainly He did not. At least, going to Heaven was only a part—the far-off part—of His plan. Whatever He meant, it was clearly something that first of all concerned this earth, that had to begin, and grow, and spread for a blessing on earth. Remember parables about it. What was it like? Little mustard seed growing to a great tree—little bit of leaven spreading through a lot of flour—a little corn of wheat springing up, first the blade, then the ear, etc. Would that mean Heaven? No. It was a little something that He was planting in the world that should spread and grow till it grew to be a great thing—till it leavened all around it. Can you not yet guess what He meant?

Well, let me try to picture what I think was the vision rising in His mind when He thought with glad hope and enthusiasm about the success of His plan. I can imagine that I see it before me. Try and make the picture in your minds as I go on. He sees before Him a sweet, fair vision—a band of boys and girls, and men and women, of true, noble, generous, Christ-like hearts; the sort of people that you can't help loving and admiring; the sort of people that make life so happy and lovely for all around them. Do you know any person like that? It is a small band at first—small, like a grain of mustard seed—only about twenty or thirty, but growing, growing, as the ages go on, till it overspreads the face of the earth. He sees in the vision how everything bad and miserable vanishes before them—all greediness, and lying, and bullying, and spite, and drunkenness, and

impurity—all selfishness and cruelty—all poverty, and misery, and pain. They are such brave, generous boys, such tender, unselfish girls—such noble, self-sacrificing men and women, in some degree like the Lord Himself. They care for nothing but what is good and true. They fear nothing but grieving their Lord. Their chief thought is the service of the Kingdom—making all life around them happy, and holy, and beautiful. Would not it be lovely to see a great growing hand like that, increasing every day? Would not they make this a happy, holy, beautiful world? Would not they watch over the sick? help the drunkard? and comfort the sorrowful? Do you think the mean, sneaking sort of boys would dare to be mean and sneaking? Would not the spiteful and untruthful, and selfish girls be utterly ashamed of themselves? Would not many people want to join the ranks of this Kingdom of God, if they saw it so grand, so beautiful, spreading over the earth? Well, that is, I think, the vision of our Lord. That is what He meant by the Kingdom of God. Which should begin where? On earth. And go on whither? To Heaven.

§ 3. *How should people enter the kingdom? (v. 15)*

Repent: believe in the good news. Which comes first? Would it do to merely tell a lot of careless people that the way to enter this Kingdom was to believe in God's goodness and forgiveness? No. First repent—be sorry. *Then* believe in the love and forgiveness of Christ. Then come forward and be baptized (like soldier

receiving the shilling), and thus join the ranks of the Kingdom of God.

§ 4. *Recruits for the Kingdom*

You remember what was said last day about St. Mark's set of pictures in first chapter. How many? Seven in to-day's Lesson. First is Jesus preaching the Kingdom of God. Six still remain. The first of them (*vv.* 16-21) tells of His going out to enlist recruits for the Kingdom of God (like recruiting sergeant looking for soldiers). Picture—Lake side. Show map. Two fishing-boats. One near. Two rough sailors casting a net into the sea. Names? Could you tell what sort of men they were, whether they were fit for the Kingdom? Could not see their hearts. How did the Lord know? He could see their hearts. Perhaps men with many faults, but sorry for them. At any rate, He knew, and He called them. They knew Him already, and had been attracted by His goodness (if time, refer to John i. 40). What post in the little band of the Kingdom should they have? Fishers of men; what did He mean? Yes. As they caught fish out of the deep, so they should catch sinful, sorrowing men out of the wicked world, and draw them into the Kingdom—into the Church—into the hand of noble hearts who should follow Christ. What a grand office, to help men to be good and happy and love Christ. That work given to us all, not only to clergy. On a little farther. Another boat. How many fishers? How many called? Whom? Perhaps He called Zebedee afterwards, or perhaps Zebedee loved Him already. At any rate, he

was probably too old to be an officer in the band, to go fishing everywhere for men like his sons. So you see the Kingdom of God beginning with five or six men; small like a grain of mustard seed.

§ 5. *The Work of the Kingdom*

What is the work of the Kingdom? Doing beautiful deeds. Helping and blessing and comforting people everywhere. See the beautiful deeds beginning. St. Mark's sixth, seventh, eighth, and tenth pictures; what are they about? Casting out devil (vv. 21-28). Peter's wife's mother (vv. 29-32). Healing the crowd of sick (vv. 32-35). Cleansing the leper (vv. 40-45). Question briefly, and picture the scenes very rapidly. How sad all this misery and sickness of the world must have made our Lord. What a delightful work was His to cure the evils and comfort the sufferers. Should you like to be engaged in it? Cannot do all the work that He could. Can you do anything of the work of the Kingdom? Comfort people; help them to be good; make life bright and happy for them. Pray for them that they may love Christ and be members of His Kingdom of God. Has the Kingdom grown much now? Yes, a great band, the great Church of God. Are all the members earnest about it? No. That is what spoils it and disappoints our Lord. That is what brings shame upon His Church. The Kingdom of God is the Church. But all its members are not in earnest now, as they were then. Can't you fancy how disappointed the Lord is as He looks upon the careless boys and girls and men and women, who

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don't care at all to do the blessed work of His Kingdom. What a pain to His heart. He has let you in through Baptism. He wants you to have all the gladness and blessing of working in His Kingdom, and making Him pleased, and making His poor children on earth happy and good. You are members of the Kingdom of God. Story—Frederick the Great examining school on the three great Kingdoms of Nature—Animal, Vegetable, and Mineral. “Now, what Kingdom does this belong to?” (holding up watch). “The Mineral Kingdom.” “And this flower?” “The Vegetable Kingdom.” “And now, what Kingdom do I belong to?” he asked. Expected answer, “The Animal Kingdom.” But the children were puzzled. At last a little girl timidly held up her hand. “Well, my little maid?” “The Kingdom of God, your Majesty.” And, amid solemn silence, the great King bowed his head. “Pray God that I may be worthy,” said he.

§ 6. *The Strength for the Kingdom*

How can you be worthy? How can you escape disappointing our Lord? Get the strength for the Kingdom's work. See the Lord's example, *v.* 35. You never can do His work faithfully without that. Try hard not to neglect it; not to get up late and run down to breakfast without prayer. Pray to the Lord, whom so many are disappointing. “Lord! I want not to disappoint Thee. I want to be a faithful member of the Kingdom of God.”