

## The International Lessons.

### I.

November 1.—John xv. 1-16.

#### CHRIST THE TRUE VINE.

THE words that need to be explained as the lesson is being read are very few.

1. "He *purgeth* it" (ver. 2). The Greek verb which is thus translated means to *cleanse*. Its adjective is found in the next verse: "Now ye are *clean*." The cleansing is done by pruning off all useless shoots.

2. *Without* me ye can do nothing (ver. 5). That is "apart from me," "cut off and separate from me."

3. "*Ordained* you" (ver. 16). The Revised Version gives "appointed you," which is better.

WHEN JESUS said: "Arise, let us go hence," the words with which the previous chapter ends, we must understand that He and the eleven left the upper room and began to descend the hill by the pathway which led across the Kedron towards the Garden of Gethsemane. It was night. We may suppose that for a time the little group proceeded in silence. They were thinking of the words He had spoken just before they left the room: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." In the words, and in the voice that uttered them, there was comfort. But they knew not how His words were to be fulfilled. They had no peace. Sorrow filled their heart.

It was the season of the year when the vines were pruned. And the custom was for the labourers in the vineyards to gather the lopped-off branches into heaps, set fire to them, and leave them there to burn. One or more of these fires soon flashed out upon them. At the sight Jesus stopped: the disciples gathered round Him; and He told them of the Vine, the True Vine, and its branches.

It is an allegory or parable. Now a parable is intended to illustrate something, or make it clear. Let us find out, in the first place, if we can, what Jesus wanted to make clear. He had spoken of the difference between Himself and the world. "*My* peace I give—not as the *world* giveth," He had said before He began this address; and with almost the same words He ended it (see the last

verse of the 16th chapter): "That *in me* ye might have peace; *in the world* ye shall have tribulation." This, then, was what He wanted to make clearer, how they could have peace in *Him*, which they could not have in the world.

Well, the world can give us some things. How do we get them? By abiding in it. That is to say, by having our hearts set upon it, by taking pleasantly to its ways and loving them. And how do we get what Christ can give us? By abiding in Him. By having our hearts set upon Him, by resting within His love, by drawing on the stores of His love.

Now come to the parable. How do the branches get what they need from the vine? By abiding in it. If they are cut off from it, they are good for nothing. That is perfectly plain about branches. It is perfectly true about us.

Then, when He has made them see that it all depends upon their abiding in Him, He tells them plainly what that is, and what comes out of it. Read the three verses 11, 12, 13. First, to abide in Him is to abide *in His love*. Secondly, we abide in His love if we keep His commandments. Thirdly, there is just one commandment to keep; it is that we love one another. And what comes out of it? It is peace. That is the one thing the world can never give. It can give a little pleasure, it can give plenty of pain and trouble, but it never can and never does give peace. Love one another and we abide within His love, and all the peace is there. Or, is there anything better even than peace? Perhaps joy is better? That is what He calls it here—"that my joy may abide in you, and that your joy may be filled full."

### II.

November 8.—John xvi. 1-15.

#### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The difficulties in this lesson are more and greater than in the last.

1. "Offended" (ver. 1). The meaning of this English word has entirely changed since the Authorised Version was made. It meant then to trip or stumble. Hence the Revised Version renders this verse thus: "These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be made to

stumble." If persecution came upon the disciples suddenly, when Jesus had left them, there was the danger that many of them might be led to deny Him. So He prepared them beforehand for it.

2. "They shall put you out of the synagogues" (ver. 2). Not for once, but for good; excommunicate you; deprive you of Church membership. The children will remember the case of the blind man in the ninth chapter of this Gospel.

3. "Will think that he doeth God service" (ver. 2). So the heathen did. The most distressing thing to them in the spread of Christianity was the desertion of the temples. So the Inquisitors did. "In the name of God," the proclamation began which condemned the martyrs to the stake. The words mean more than doing good service for God, they mean offering religious worship.

4. "Reprove" (ver. 8). Convince, convict.

5. "The prince of this world" (ver. 11). The devil.

6. "He shall not speak of Himself" (ver. 13). That is, *from* Himself. It does not mean *about* Himself, although that also is true. His message will be given to Him: "Whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak."

IF THE TEACHER will refresh his memory with the exposition of the lesson for October 25 (p. 40), he will enter upon this difficult portion with an advantage on his side. Especially let us be perfectly clear upon it that it is as an Advocate the Holy Spirit comes, not as a Comforter, which is a mistranslation. Now, an advocate has just one thing to do. Suppose he is the advocate of the person accused; he has simply to get him *acquitted*. That is what Christ means here. He is speaking to the disciples, and he is warning them of the treatment they will receive from the world after He has left this earth. But the world will not have it all its own way with them. For, though they will be helpless enough themselves, He will send an Advocate to plead their cause. And the one purpose of the Advocate will be to acquit them, to prove that they are right, and the world wrong.

But while an advocate has just this one thing to do, he has two ways of doing it. Every one who has been in a court of justice has observed that, in the first place, he cross-questions the accuser, and breaks down his evidence if he can; and, in the second place, he helps the accused person in his

defence, encouraging him, calling things to his remembrance, and leading him gently on till he completely vindicates himself.

Such is the double work of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate. In the first part of this narrative (vers. 1-11), He breaks down the evidence of the persecutors. He convicts them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. That is to say, He convinces them that it is not the followers of Christ who are guilty of sin, but they themselves in not believing in Christ; for He convinces them also that righteousness is on the side of Christ, as proved by His resurrection and ascension to glory; and He convinces them, finally, that judgment will come, not upon Christ's disciples, but upon themselves, if they do not repent; for their master, the devil, in whose protection they trusted, has already been judged and cast out.

Then the Advocate turns to the persecuted followers (vers. 12-15). He guides them into all the truth, till they know it and declare it. He turns their whole thought upon Him who is the Truth, till, for the love of Him, *they are ready to go even into bonds and death*; and thus their cause is pleaded, and their victory won.

### III.

November 15.—John xvii. 1-19.

#### CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR THE DISCIPLES.

The teacher will feel that in this lesson he has reached the climax of difficulty. And it is the climax. Profound and heart-searching as are the incidents of the succeeding lessons, they are incidents, and not so hard to teach.

1. "The hour is come." It is the hour of His death, *the* hour in the history of the world. The hour of His death is the hour of His glory, for through death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and finished the work which His Father gave Him to do.

2. "Glorify Thy Son." This is not so much "*make* Him glorious," as "*show* Him to be glorious," "let His glory appear." It is thus only that God can be glorified. And as far as we are concerned, it is done in this way:—Professing that we are His children, we live so nobly that men see how lovely a thing it is to be the children of God, and they say He must be a great God and a holy God whose children are so good and true.

3. "I pray not for the world" (ver. 9). That

is, not at present. But when He said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do," He did pray for the world.

4. "Now I am no more in the world" (ver. 11). His death is not yet accomplished, but it is so certain that He looks upon it as if it were actually past, and He stood on the other side of the tomb.

5. "The son of perdition" (ver. 12). Judas Iscariot. The phrase is a striking one. But the Hebrews were fond of such expressions; for example, "children of light," "children of darkness," "son of peace," "sons of thunder." It brings the two, Judas and perdition or perishing, very close together, as if there were a relationship between them.

6. "That the Scripture might be fulfilled" (ver. 12). For the Scripture, see Ps. xli. 9. Judas did not perish because it was necessary to fulfil the Scripture. But the Scripture could not be broken, and Judas with his own will so worked towards his bitter end, that he established the truth of it. Like Pharaoh, a man of a hardened heart, he was placed in such a position that he fulfilled the prophecy, but the hardness of his unbelieving heart was due to himself alone.

THIS CHAPTER is called Christ's Intercessory Prayer. It consists of three parts. In verses 1-5 He intercedes for Himself, that He may be glorified. In verses 6-19 He intercedes for His disciples, that they may be kept from evil while they are in the world. And in verses 19 to end He intercedes for the Church, those who would afterwards believe the disciples' word. We have to do with the first two parts only.

First, He prays for Himself, that He may be glorified. But what is glory? Is it happiness? Yes, and more. Honour, power, holiness? Yes, all these, and more. Glory is all that heaven has to give. And so Christ was glorified by His resurrection and ascension to heaven.

Then He prays for the disciples; and His prayer is that the Father may keep them from the evil that is in the world. He Himself is going away, for He has finished His work in the world. But they have not finished their work, they are just about to be consecrated for their work (see vers. 17-19), and sent into the world to do it. He does not pray that they should be taken out of the world therefore, but that they should be kept safe from the evil that is in it, while they are doing their work. And the children must understand

that if they open their hearts to the love of Christ, there is no probability that they will therefore die. But it is quite certain that as long as they love Him, and do the work He sends them to do, God will keep them from the power of the Evil One. For Jesus uses a wonderful argument with the Father. Thou gavest them to me, He says, and I have taught them by my words and my works till they have believed in me; and believing in me, they have believed in Thee; and thus I have made them Thine. Take care of them, He says, *for they are now Thine own*. It is a prayer that must prevail with a father's heart.

#### IV.

November 22.—John xviii. 1-13.

#### CHRIST BETRAYED.

1. "He went forth." In the lesson for November 1, it was supposed that Jesus left the upper room when He said, "Arise, let us go hence." Then "He went forth" would mean that He now passed beyond the city altogether, on to the crossing of the Kedron, and into the Garden of Gethsemane. But some think that He had not left the upper room till now.

2. "Let these go their way" (ver. 8). That is, the disciples. He had said, "Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition" (xvii. 12), and now He will take care that His own prophecy is fulfilled. But it is significant that in quoting that prophecy, John changes the expression "none of them is lost" into "I have lost none." None of them was lost, *except one*, but He had literally lost none; Judas had lost himself.

JESUS and Judas are here face to face for the last time on earth.

A few hours ago they had sat together at the supper table. But the heart of Judas was in the possession of the Evil One. Once, perhaps, when first he had drawn to Jesus, the evil spirits had been driven out of his heart; but it had not been filled with the love of Christ, and they had returned to find it empty, and had taken possession of it sevenfold more than before. And now as they sat at the table together, both Jesus and Judas were uneasy. Jesus shows it in His burdened cry, "One of you shall betray me;" Judas in his eager, self-conscious question, "Is it I?" Then came the sop, the pre-emptory word,

"What thou doest, do quickly," and Judas passed out into the night.

It was night, but he knew where he was going, and he knew the way. Had not Caiaphas said, "It is expedient that one man die?" And from that moment had he not waited for his opportunity to take Him? Judas found the house of Caiaphas; the bargain was made; Pilate, always uneasy at Passover times lest there should be an uproar among these turbulent Jews, granted a strong force to go with him; and now Roman soldiers, temple officers, and priests are on their way towards the Garden of Gethsemane. It is a strange array, with their lanterns, and torches, and weapons; but stranger is the purpose of their midnight march; and that one of the chosen Twelve should be their guide is the strangest thing of all.

Meantime Jesus had been busy with the Eleven. He had sought to prepare them for the coming danger, and they had only been made sad. He had tried to comfort them, and they had become much perplexed. He had given them proofs of His marvellous love, and He had rejoiced in the signs of their love to Him. But Judas was never absent from His thought. He had seen him glide, like a guilty thief, through the dimly-lighted streets; He had heard the bargain struck with Caiaphas; and now when the agony is over in the Garden, the tramp of the soldiers reaches His ear, and He knows the step of him who is their guide. They meet again, for the last time on earth. For Jesus went forth in front of the Eleven, and Judas passed on in front of his gang, and the traitor's lips have touched the Master's face. Then the opposing forces come together, and a valiant but misunderstanding disciple draws his sword and smites. The hour is come. His only request is that the Eleven may not be arrested with Him. Let these go their way: I am ready. And they bound Him, and led Him away.

## V.

November 29—John xix. 1-16.

### CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

1. "By our law he ought to die" (ver. 7). The law to which the Jews referred will be found in Lev. xxiv. 16, "He that blasphemeth the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death." At the meeting of the Sanhedrin, a little before this, the question had been put to Jesus, "Art Thou then

the Son of God?" His answer, "Ye say that I am," was equivalent to "Yes, I am." And at once they counted Him guilty of blasphemy.

2. "From above" (ver. 11). That is "from God."

3. "He that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (ver. 11). This must refer either to Judas or to Caiaphas. • But Judas did not deliver Jesus to Pilate, his dealings were with the Jewish priests. It was the Jewish priests who delivered Jesus directly to Pilate, because, though they had condemned Him to death, they could not carry out the sentence themselves. And Caiaphas had the chief responsibility of their action.

4. "It was the preparation of the Passover, and about the sixth hour" (ver. 14). This verse opens the two very difficult questions of the day and the hour of Jesus' death. Perhaps the best English discussion is in M'Clellan's *Four Gospels*. But on one would think of touching such questions in the short hour of the Sunday school.

THE PLACE is Pilate's palace, called by the Romans the Prætorium, and translated in our version "the common hall," or "the judgment hall." It is still very early in the morning, but Pilate is astir, for there is unwonted excitement to-day, even for a day in the Passover week. It was little more than midnight when a request had come to him from Caiaphas that he should send a captain and his band to secure the arrest of a turbulent Galilæan. He had sent the soldiers, and now waited with some anxiety for the man to appear.

"Then led they Jesus unto the palace; and it was early." Pilate met them. He looked upon Jesus. He was half relieved, half annoyed. Was this gentle, most inoffensive sufferer the turbulent and ambitious character he had sent his soldiers to apprehend? This the King of the Jews? Pilate is relieved; there is not much trial needed here. He is partly annoyed that they should disturb him with so manifestly simple a case. He went out to the people. No great crowd probably stood outside the palace, but it was easy to see that the priests and their officers were strongly represented. With something of scorn on his lip, Pilate asks them: "What accusation bring you against this man?" They see the scorn. "If he were not a malefactor, we should not have delivered him up unto thee." "Well, take Him and judge Him yourselves." And then came the firm response that made Pilate pause: "It is not lawful for us

to put any man to death." It is more serious than he thought.

Pilate turned and entered the palace. He will cross-question Jesus. Can turbulence and crime be concealed behind that quiet and simple exterior? And has He really the ambition of a pretender to the throne? Pilate cross-questions Him. It is a strange examination. Pilate finds himself landed in old subtleties of the debating school. Is a lie ever justifiable? What is truth? He suddenly passes out to the people again. For a fortunate recollection has come to him. To-morrow is the Passover. He has always released some prisoner on that day, letting the people choose the man. He will offer to release this Jesus. "Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber."

That was Pilate's first error. Jesus did not need to be released as a favour. He was guilty of nothing; He should have been simply let go. And then they could have got their Barabbas also. Pilate had openly let his own sense of justice be over-ridden by the clamour of the priests. From that moment it was a losing battle. Every step is only more unjust, and leads more surely to the inevitable end.

First comes the scourging. Pilate feels that these priests have some bitter hostility to this man. He will scourge Him to please and satisfy them, and then let Him go. They accept the scourging, but they are not satisfied. They see the blood

that flows from the wounded back, and they only cry for more. Pilate hates the whole proceeding; but he fears these bloodthirsty priests. He fears them, and yet he cannot refrain from insulting them. They watch his soldiers dress Jesus as a king; they see them come up to Him one by one and make their mock obeisance. Does Pilate hope to turn the matter into ridicule, and so get Jesus off? He brings Him out. "Behold the man!" But they are in no mood for humour, however grim. With startling decision the cry breaks upon his ear, "Crucify, crucify."

Pilate is driven to be serious. They now send home their double accusation with irresistible force. "He is a blasphemer, for He calls Himself the Son of God; He is an enemy of Cæsar, for He calls Himself a King." The one plays upon Pilate's superstitious fears, the other recalls his political danger. For Tiberius, the ruling Cæsar, is a fickle master, and Pilate is no favourite with him now. In recent months he has heard of one after another of his friends who have fallen and lost their heads through such an accusation as this: "Thou art not Cæsar's friend."

He makes his choice. As Caiaphas had already done: It is expedient for us that one man die. "Then delivered he Him therefore unto them to be crucified."

"Choose ye this day." It is a choice always; and now, as then, a personal choice: Jesus or myself; and the children know it already.

## Point and Illustration.

**"For I am not ashamed."**

*Macrae's Gilfillan: Anecdotes and Reminiscences.*

WHEN EMERSON visited Dundee he was Gilfillan's guest at the manse. A story is told of this visit, that after supper, when the time drew near for family worship, Gilfillan took Emerson and showed him to his room. When the household assembled, Mrs. Gilfillan observed that Emerson was not present. She said quietly to Gilfillan, "Where is Mr. Emerson?" Gilfillan said, "He has gone to his bedroom." "Have you not asked him to come to worship?" "No, I don't think he would like it. His views are very different from ours. It might embarrass him." "Never mind that, George. Go and ask him. Let the refusal come from him."

He went upstairs to Emerson's room, and found the philosopher with his coat off, sitting on the bed. He said, "The goodwife, Mr. Emerson, wants you down to worship. Will you come?" "Of course I will," said Emerson, and went.

Afterwards he said, with reference to this incident, "I thought more of the goodwife in that matter than of the goodman."

**Not a Minister.**

*The Christian Leader.*

NOT many Sundays ago, a precentor in Scotland, whose daily occupation is that of a mason, made his way into the vestry to see about the psalms. He was received with a deeply drawn sigh, and the exclamation, "Thank God, Mr. Livingstone, that you're not a minister." "And thank God, Mr. Chalmers," was the immediate reply, "that you're not a mason." The psalms were ready, and the list was handed over without another word being said. But at night, when the worthy workman reaches his home, his fingers worn to the quick and bleeding with handling rough heavy stones, his good wife brings, if not comfort to his heart, yet a very merry twinkle to his eye by saying, "Thank God, Mr. Livingstone, that you're not a minister."