

Our Story.

A MODERN PROBLEM.

ESTHER had been born and bred in the land of Philistia—in that outlying district of Philistia that borders on Aecadia. It was a land of which Maxwell Blunt knew practically nothing. He too had lived in a narrow world—a world intellectual, artistic, and advanced—a world reputed tolerant, which is, indeed, tolerant of all forms of infidelity to old thoughts, old customs, old creeds, and only intolerant of those fashions which time has made conventional and those beliefs which authority has made respectable—a West End Bohemia which has no dealings with the Philistines.

sat within the circle of the lamplight at a little table, and bent over a book of poems, never reading a poem straight through, but glancing at the titles, committing them to memory, and then reading twice or three those passages which some more intellectual reader had thought noteworthy, and had marked with pencil. It was foolish, when her husband and his friends talked familiarly of this and that, to be doubtful whether it was poem or prose, drama, philosophy, or theology. And a scored book was, indeed, a find! What Maxwell or his friends had pencilled it was safe to admire. It was dull work, this hurriedly formed acquaintanceship with great authors, but Esther was seldom impatient, it was not her way.

possession that had made all things easy, and in the real interview her gracious ease of manner had entirely forsaken her. She felt and looked like a culprit. The teaching of her girlhood still clung to her; her intellect had never questioned any part of that teaching. It was all real—all true to her, but she had set it aside because it stood in the way of her happiness. She could not justify herself. At an inopportune moment, too, she remembered all that she owed to her uncle; that for sixteen years she had been as his adopted child, that for sixteen years—years of poverty and misfortune for her parents—he had given her food and clothing and house-room, and had given the gifts lovingly, ungrudgingly; remembered, too, with unwelcome distinctness, how cheerfully she had requited him. She had kept her engagement a secret from him because she had known that he must inevitably disapprove; she had sent him tidings of the marriage only when the marriage was over, and then had spoken vaguely about her husband and herself, and had slurred over the details which would offend his orthodox prejudices. He might justly reproach her.

the promise made through him (Mal. iii. 1, and vi. 5, 6). Spirit and power of Elias: Greek form of Elijah. He would do a work similar to Elijah, whom the people expected would come back before the Messiah came. (See Matt. xi. 14). Turn the hearts of the fathers to the children: To bring peace and love into the home, and new care of parents for their children, or to turn the hearts of all who know God, the Father, to the ignorant, the Gentiles. Wisdom of the just: It is always wise to be good.

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Sabbath School Work.

LESSON HELPS. FIRST QUARTER.

From January 5 to March 30, 1890. LESSON I, January 5. THE FORERUNNER ANNOUNCED.—Luke 1: 5-17.

Commit verses 13-16. GOLDEN TEXT.—Behold I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me.—Mal. iii. 1.

CENTRAL TRUTH.—God answers prayer abundantly at the best time, and in the wisest way.

DAILY READINGS. M. Luke i. 1-17. W. Luke i. 18-25. Th. Mal. iii. 1-8. F. Ex. xxxvii. 25-39. Sa. Luke xviii. 1-14. Su. Jas. v. 13-20.

TIME.—B. C. 6. The first week in October. The autumn date of service for the course of Abia.

PLACE.—The events of this lesson took place in the temple at Jerusalem. Zacharias' home was in the hill country of Judea; tradition places it in Hebron, one of the thirteen towns near Jerusalem assigned to the priests.

RULERS.—Augustus Caesar, emperor of Rome. Herod the Great, king of Judea (32nd year), subject to Rome; Cymbeline became king of Britain B.C. 4.

STATE OF THE WORLD.—The Roman Empire extended over most of the known world, and then had prepared roads, commerce, and a settled government for the protection and spread of the new Gospel. The Greek language was spoken almost everywhere, and this greatly assisted the missionaries. It was a time of peace.

It was a time of great intellectual activity. The Roman Empire had a population of 120,000,000. Rome had between five and six millions of inhabitants. Palestine had a population of about 6,000,000, the same as the present number of Jews throughout the world. Galilee had about 2,000,000 inhabitants; Jerusalem, about 2,500,000.

INTRODUCTION.—The first four verses of Luke are a preface to the book. The first two chapters have been called the Gospel of the Infancy. In today's lesson we have the first dawning rays of the new era of the Kingdom of God.

HELPS OVER HARD PLACES.—5. In the days of Herod: Herod the Great, the first of the Herods. He died a few months after Christ was born, about a year and a half after the date of this lesson. Zacharias: Greek form of Zachariah ("remembered by Jehovah"). Nothing is known of him beyond what is said here. A certain priest. The priests were all descended from Aaron of the tribe of Levi. Course of Abia: i.e., of Abijah. The eighth of the 24 courses, into which the priests who performed the temple services were divided. Each course ministered a week at a time, twice each year. 6. Righteous before God: In His sight, truly good at heart, and not merely in outward conduct. Commandments: The moral law. Ordinances: The rites and ceremonies of religion. 8. Executed the priest's office: The offering of the daily sacrifice and the incense, etc. Order of his course: The 24 courses served in a regular order, one after another. His was the eighth. 9. His lot: Which persons in each course should do the work, and what part each should do, was settled by lot. 10. Praying . . . incense: Incense, composed of sweet perfumes, was a type of prayer. All the people thus joined in the priest's office. Praying without: i.e., outside the temple building, but in the courts. 11. Angel of the Lord: Gabriel (v. 19). 13. Thy prayer heard: Both for a Son, and for the redemption of the people. 14. Dwelt neither wine: Be a Nazirite, consecrated to God (Num. vi. 1-5). 15. Go before him: These words express nearly the words of Malachi the fulfillment of

QUESTIONS

INTRODUCTORY.—Who was Luke? What can you tell about his life? When and where was his Gospel written? From whose preaching is he supposed to have learned much of it? What does he say about it in his preface (l. 1-4.)

SUBJECT. PRAYER AND ITS ANSWER. I. TWO GOOD PEOPLE (vs. 5, 6).—What were the names of the parents of John the Baptist? To what order and tribe did they belong? In whose days did they live? What was "the course of Abia"? How is the character of these people described? What is meant by "righteous before God"? What two forms of God's law did they obey? Is one truly righteous who strives to obey commandments, but not ordinances; or ordinances, and not commandments? What is said of the prayers of such people? (Jas. v. 16.) What of the prayers of the wicked? (Prov. xv. 8; xxviii. 9.) The reason for this difference?

II. THEIR EARNEST PRAYER (vs. 7-10).—What was one of their great desires? (v. 7.) What else did they pray for? (vs. 14, 16, 74, 75, 78; ii. 25.) How far is it right to pray for earthly blessings? Should spiritual blessings and the salvation of the world be far more earnestly prayed for? What was one of Zacharias' duties? When and where was the incense offered? What were the people doing at the same time? In what respects was incense a symbol of prayer? Did all the sacrifices and ceremonies likewise have a spiritual meaning.

III. GOD'S ABUNDANT ANSWER (vs. 11, 17).—FIRST FOR THEMSELVES.—Who appeared during the hour of prayer? What came to Jesus while he was praying? (Luke ix. 29.) What blessing came to Job while he was praying for others? (Job xlii. 10.) Why was Zacharias afraid? What did the angel promise him? Was the blessing of a child doubly blessed because he would bring good to so many? Was such a blessing worth waiting for? Are God's answers to prayers withheld, because delayed? Luke xviii. 1-7.) Why does God sometimes wait a long time before answering prayer?

SECOND, FOR OTHERS.—What blessings would John bring? What Old Testament promise made 400 years before would he fulfil? (Mal. iii. 1; iv. 5, 6; Matt. xi. 14.) What kind of greatness should be his? What is said of his temperance? What great things would he do? How does religion "turn the hearts of the fathers to the children"?

OLD TESTAMENT ILLUSTRATIONS.—What promise was made to Abraham? (Gen. xiii. 14-17; xviii. 18; xxi. 17, 18.) When was it fulfilled? Josh. xxi. 43-45, almost 500 years afterwards, and in Christ almost 2,000 years after.

What promise was made to Caleb? How long did he wait for its fulfilment? (Josh. xiv. 6-14.)

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS. I. Obedience to God's commands is the gateway to high experiences and large blessings. II. It is right to pray for temporal blessings, but much more earnestly for the salvation of the world. III. Prayer is like incense, composed of the fragrant spices of praise, penitence, faith, hope, love; offered on the altar of the heart, kindled by the love of Christ. IV. The best gifts come in answer to prayer—Jesus' transfiguration, Job's prosperity. V. The answer is often delayed, but is sure to come, often in unexpected ways and times. VI. The answer, long coming, is better than we dared to hope. VII. True greatness is the greatness of love, of character, of usefulness. VIII. Christianity has special care for the children.—Pelubet.

THAT peace is an evil peace that doth shut truth out of doors. If peace and truth cannot go together, truth is to be preferred, and rather to be chosen for a companion than peace.—J. Tillingshast.

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