

of the scholars and young people ought to be discontinued.

We have recently introduced into the church and Sunday School with which I am connected a plan for regular systematic beneficence from which we expect most gratifying results. We are endeavouring to get each church member and Sunday School scholar to give at least one cent per week for some one of the following objects, Home Missions, Foreign Missions and Ministerial Education. We have provided each scholar with a card. So far as possible we get the scholars to give one cent to each of the objects. If he can only give one cent we allow the scholar to say for which one of these objects he wishes to contribute. Each teacher is provided with a book in which he enters the name of the scholar, and opposite, the amount he will give per week for one or all of these objects. The contributions of each class are placed weekly in an envelope, numbered to correspond with the number of the class, and are deposited on the collection plate, and taken by the treasurer of the school and credited to each class. We will be enabled to tell at any time just the amount each class contributes for each of these objects. From the results already attained under this system we can calculate with certainty that the contributions from our Sunday School will be increased at least 400 per cent over the contributions of any previous year. This of itself is most desirable, when we think what an amount of good can be accomplished with the money; but the greatest benefit will accrue to the scholars themselves, in their increased interest in missionary work, and the habit which they will form of giving regularly, systematically and as God gives them the ability.

Poetry.

"The Darkest Hour is Just Before the Dawn."

I have heard it oft
From lips whose dearest rest lend grace
To the familiar words, till through my life
There went a blissful thrill, like far-off strains
Of melody from harp-strings, sweet long
I have seen the black, low-hanging clouds
Between me and the blue, grow wondrous fair,
O'erwritten with its meaning. I have known
The anguish that would sometimes overleap
His barriers, tossed by the magic song
Of hope that trembled sweetly through the thought.
All this hath been, and yet the melody
Died once more into silence—all the gleams
And lines of light gone out in utter gloom.
The song changed quickly to despairing words,
And I have cried, "Yes, false! 'night has no end!"
Yet once again I will believe it true,
Although the hour is long, so long, the dawn
Will come. When patience hath her perfect work,
Then, then, O soul, how sweet will be the bliss;
That sweet for all this long, dark, gloom,
That shall o'erflow thee with full happiness.
O Love Divine, my wayward eyes I turn
From where they long-expectant, might the light,
And wait, unanxious, till it shall arise,
Glad in the thought that it will be
Most fair when in Thy love Thou sendest it.

GRETA.

Some of the English Bishops are speaking their opinions very freely. The Bishop of Chester ever and anon denounces the Ritualism which is working so much mischief in his diocese. The Bishop of Manchester says that many modern hymns, and some of them the most popular, are very namby-pamby and strangely silly. They are full of erroneous conceptions of all sorts of things—of God, of heaven, of hell, of angels, and he knows not what besides.

S. S. Lesson Department.

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Prepared for the Christian Helper by the
Rev. J. W. A. Stewart, B.A.

Feb. 2.—The Reading of the Law—
Neh. viii: 1-8.

GOLDEN TEXT.

The entrance of thy words giveth light: it giveth understanding unto the simple.—Ps. cxix: 130.

Time B.C. 444. First day of the seventh month—(Tishri—September, October), of the ecclesiastical year. This was the first month of the civil year. The feast of the trumpets (Lev. xxiii: 24) was celebrated on the first and second days of this month.

Place. Jerusalem. At the water-gate, where was a large square or square called Ophel.

CONNECTION.

After the interruption recorded in the last lesson, the work went on steadily and rapidly till its completion. Nehemiah, who exercised a paternal care over the people in all matters, found time during this busy period, to attend to the complaints of some of the poor, who were suffering severely in consequence of debts they had contracted. Their property was heavily mortgaged, and in some cases, their children had been given into bondage. Nehemiah persuaded the rich creditors, not only to exact usury no longer, but even to cancel all debts, and set the debtors free. While Nehemiah was actively engaged in good works, his enemies were plotting against him, and when the task of building drew near its completion, they made several attempts to get him into their power. Four times in succession, Sanballat and Geshem sent messages inviting him to meet them in the plain of Ono, some 25 or 30 miles from Jerusalem. This plain is called the "valley of craftsmen," in ch. xi: 35. These invitations having been refused, they sent him an open letter, charging him with treason against the Persian king. But to the Nehemiahs gave a brief and indignant denial, and then dismissed the subject with a prayer to God for strength. And strength was needed, for he had false friends at home as well as foes abroad, and these false friends tried to induce him to take refuge in those sacred precincts, where it was unlawful, for any one to enter who was not of the priestly tribe. The penalty was death. (Numb. xviii: 7) But Nehemiah discerned the plot, and would not go in. In any case, he would rather forfeit his life, than break the command.

His enemies being thus completely foiled, Nehemiah at last brought the work of building to a triumphant completion, at which "they" (the foes) "were much cast down in their own eyes." It was necessary, however, still to take every precaution. The gates were not to be opened till broad day, and they were to be shut and barred every evening. The people were still few. A census was now taken, but is not given to us. The register here introduced into Nehemiah is essentially a repetition of that in Ezra, and is not the register taken by Nehemiah himself.

The next event is the reading of the law before the assembled people, which is the subject of the lesson. The text of the law became more generally and familiarly known after the captivity, chiefly through the institution of synagogues. "Meanwhile" Ezra, according to tradition, devoted his last days to the collection and transcription of the sacred oracles.—Green.

EXPOSITION.

Verse 1. Read the last clause of the preceding chapter with this verse, thus: "And when the seventh month came and the children of Israel were in their cities, all the people gathered themselves, &c." Street. i.e. square or open space. Water-gate. "A gate in the eastern wall,

either for the escape of the superfluous water from the Temple reservoirs, or for the introduction of water from the Kidron valley, when the reservoirs were low."—Cook. This square, between the south-east or the Temple and the water-gate, was called Ophel. Ezra. This is the first mention of him in this book. The supposition is that after completing the work mentioned in his book he returned to the court of Artaxerxes, and again came to Jerusalem shortly before the time of this lesson. Scribes. The special duty of the scribes was to write, to study and to interpret to the people all the sacred words. See, Ezra 7: 6, 10. The office was of the highest importance.

Verse 2. The priest. Ezra "was a Jewish priest and a Persian judge" as well as a scribe, but is best known as "Ezra the Scribe." The public reading of the law was commanded, Deut. 31: 10-13. All that could hear, &c. i.e., all the children that were old enough to understand. Upon the first day, &c. See introductory notes.

Verse 3. From the morning until mid-day. i.e., about six hours. Ezra paused now and then while his assistants gave explanations of what he had read. And the ears of all the people. Everyone has his own Bible now; then there were but few copies of the Scriptures in existence. "Even as late as A.D. 1272 it would take the wages of a laboring man for 13 years to buy one Bible."—Peloubet. What a change printing has made, and what a blessing!

Verse 4. Pulpit. i.e., a platform, probably a pretty rough structure if compared with our pulpits. And beside him stood Mattathiah &c. "These 13 persons were probably the chief priests of the court: which was at that time performing the temple service."—Cook.

Verse 5. Opened the book. The skin of some animal, prepared for the purpose, was used to write on, the ink was made of lampblack and gall juice, a red ink of iron and galls. The writings were kept in the form of rolls. "Ezra opened the book," i.e., unrolled the skin or parchment. All the people stood up. This showed their respect for the Word of God and also their eagerness to hear it.

Verse 6. Blessed the Lord. i.e., thanked and praised the Lord. God bless us by the bestowal of His favors. "Bless them that curse you," i.e., desire their happiness. A pity that one word is made to serve so many different ideas; it leads to confusion and awkwardness. How awkward to say "We bless God for His blessings;" but it is perfectly correct. The great God. See the book of Job for wonderful descriptions of God's greatness,—e.g. Job 26: 6-14, in which v. 14 is intensely sublime after what precedes it. For an example of blessing God, see 1 Chron. 29: 10-19. Amen, i.e., "so let it be." By saying this the people expressed their earnest desire that it might be according to Ezra's prayer, and that they accepted what he read as binding upon them. Lifting up their hands, they called God to witness this their desire and acceptance, and then they assumed the attitude of humility in worshipping the great God.

Verse 7. These 13 persons were probably leaders amongst the Levites, and they with the rest of the Levites stood in the crowd, one here and one there repeating and explaining what Ezra read. "There were probably as many as 20,000 people, and one voice could not reach them all."—Peloubet.

Verse 8. So they read. "Ezra read and they (the Levites) re-read."—Peloubet. Gave the sense. This probably implies two things: they expounded what they read, as ministers do now; but first they translated the law from the pure Hebrew in which it was written, into the Chaldean language then used by the people. The people learned to speak Chaldean in their captivity and lost to some extent the language spoken by Moses.