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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

First Quarter-Lesson XII.—March 22.

ELISHA'S DEFENDERS.—2 Kings 6:8-15.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*Fear not; for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*—2 Kings 6:16.

A CLUSTER OF GOOD DEEDS BY ELISHA. Several interesting miracles wrought by Elisha it may be well to glance at because they are necessary for a complete picture of his life and work.

Elisha heals the Noxious Pottage (2 Kings 4:38-41), at Gilgal, at one of the schools of the prophets. There was a famine. The ordinary food being scarce, the sons of the prophets went out into the fields to gather any herbs they could find. Among them was a plant that Ioked harmless, but was in reality poisonous. It is called the wild gourd in our translation. This fruit might be mistaken for a melon. Some one ignorant of its nature put it in the pottage. But when they tasted of the pottage, they cried out, "There is death in the pot!" Then Elisha took some meal and cast it into the pot; and the pottage was rendered harmless.

Death in the Pot. There may be brought into our lives, unknowingly, that which will bring bitterness, pain, and death, as (1) a bad habit in the life; (2) a bad trait in character; (3) a sin on the conscience; (4) a wrong custom in society; (5) saloons and gambling in the community; (6) wrong methods and principles in politics; (7) errors among truths; (8) bad books in our reading.

The cure must be by divine power, the power of the Holy Spirit working through that which is healthful and wholesome.

Elisha feeds One Hundred Men with Twenty Loaves (2 Kings 4:42-44). A man from Baal Shalish brought an offering of the first-fruits to Elisha at Gilgal, 20 loaves and some fresh ears of corn. Elisha bidding them set this meagre allowance before the 100 men in the school of the prophets, all were satisfied, and food was left over.

Elisha causes an Iron Axe-head, lost in the Jordan, to float (2 Kings 6:1-7). Probably near Jericho, where was one of the schools of the prophets. The school had outgrown its accommodations, and desired to build anew. The whole community, with Elisha, went down to the river and began to cut down trees. The supply of axes was not sufficient, and some had to be borrowed; the head of one of the borrowed axes fell into the river. Elisha threw a stick upon the water near the place as a sign; and the iron axe-head rose to the surface, and was recovered.

Elisha foretells a Famine (2 Kings 8:1), so as to aid the Shunammite, who had been so kind to him. Note in all these miracles (1) They were all for others, and not for himself.

(2) They were for the confirmation of the authority and influence of Elisha, and thus for the advancement of religion. They were God's signet and seal to the words of his prophet.

(3) They were a proof of the personal existence and power of God.

(4) They were expressions of the goodness and love of God. They were for the comfort and help of those in trouble.

(5) They were for an example to the people, to lead them to cherish all kindness and helpfulness to others.

ELISHA GIVES AID TO HIS COUNTRY.—Vers. 8-12. *Then the king of Syria, Benhadad II. He was king of Damascus and the smaller Syrian states around it. It was he that sent a letter about Naaman. Warred against Israel. Whether this was before the cure of Naaman or after, we have no indication. Syria was a formidable adversary to Israel. The inroads described first in this chapter appears to have been made by bands of plunderers. And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, Beware that thou pass not such a place, or beware that thou pass not over such a place, leaving it unoccupied. For thither the Syrians are come down. He must either avoid the place, or he must occupy and defend it. And the king sent to the place. Either a single messenger to find out of the prophet's warning were true, or troops to occupy it. Not once nor twice; that is, several times. The heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled. He was enraged at the defeat of his schemes, and perplexed at the mysterious manner of his defeat. Which of us for the king of Israel? His secret designs, being known to the enemy, made him sure that there was treachery among his leaders. And one of his servants said. This is supposed to have been Naaman, the healed leper, whose marvellous cure had made him regard the prophet as almost omniscient. Elisha... telleth...*

Practical Hints.

It is one duty of ministers and teachers to warn both rulers and people against the plots and stratagems of the enemy.

the words that thou speakest in thy bed-chamber. That is to say, in the great, at possible secrecy.

THE ATTACK ON ELISHA AT DOTHAN.—Vers. 13, 14. *Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him. If the prophet were in keeping of the king of Syria, the ambuscade might succeed. Or possibly he may have hoped to compel Elisha to use his supernatural powers for himself. Behold he is in Dothan. Elisha was here on a visit of some kind. Therefore sent he thither... a great host. A large company. Large for the capture of one single man of peace. They came by night. So as to take the city by surprise, and Elisha without opportunity for escape. And compassed the city about; i. e., beset all the gates, so that none could escape.*

ELISHA'S DEFENDERS.—Vers. 15-17. *The servant of the man of God. Perhaps it was one of the prophet-disciples who had accompanied Elisha. This was a new servant. His faith was easily shaken. Was risen early. Awakened by some noise or from the besieging force. And gone forth. To see what was the matter. Alas, my Master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not. He comforts him by his own faith and experience. They that be with us are more than they that be with them. He gave utterance to the conviction of all God's saints when the world persecutes them: God, they know, is on their side; they need not fear. And Elisha prayed, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. Enable him to see with his spiritual eyes the realities around him. Nothing was created or changed for him. All he needs is opened eyes.*

We need to pray for ourselves the prayer that Elisha prayed for his attendant, "Lord, that our eyes may be opened," our spiritual eyes. We need to see God's hand in history. We need to see God's wisdom and love in nature. We need to have heaven as real to us as the world around us. We need to have our eyes opened to the spiritual meaning of the Word of God. We need to see the spiritual forces of life, that goodness, truth, godliness, and love are more real than houses or lands. We need to see the consequences of a bad life, its invisible but real qualities that destroy the soul. We need to have our eyes opened to the opportunities of doing good, to the possibilities of our lives, to the joys and hopes of the Christian life, to the fullness of the promises of God. And, he saw; and, behold, the mountain. The hill on which Dothan was built. Was full of horses and chariots of fire. The Syrian army surrounded the hill at its base, so that escape seemed impossible. But between the surrounding army and the prophet the whole space was filled with these fiery symbols of God's protecting hosts.

ELISHA CONQUERS HIS ENEMIES BY KINDNESS.—Vers. 18. *And when they (the Syrian army) came down (from the hills on which they were encamped) to him. To Elisha, to capture him. Elisha prayed... Smite this people I pray thee with blindness. This was not a revengeful prayer, but to teach the Syrians about the true God and his goodness; to deliver the people from these raids. And he smote them with blindness. The blindness, the bewilderment, disabled them from recognizing Elisha, or understanding where they were or what they were about, and put them wholly in the prophet's power.*

Then Elisha went to the leader, and offered to guide them to the place and the men they sought. Some have thought that Elisha was guilty of deception when he said, "This is not the way, neither is this the city: follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek. But he led them to Samaria." Did the man of God resort to a false strategy? This case has occasioned a good deal of difficulty. The fact is that Elisha told them the plain, simple truth. Dothan was not Elisha's home. He was so surrounded with his unseen defenders that the Syrians could not touch him at Dothan. They were blind, and could not recognize him. He brought them to his home, and there was found and seen by them. The fact that the Syrians did not comprehend precisely his meaning, and imagined that he would fulfil his word in some other way, does not in the least detract from the simple, open truth of Elisha's words. Elisha led them 12 miles to Samaria, the capital. Here, their sight being restored, they found Elisha in his own city, but they were captives in the midst of their enemies. Jehoram wanted to kill them; but Elisha objected to this, and instead supplied them with abundant food, and sent them home. As the result, the plundering bands which had been in the habit of ravaging the territory ceased their incursions for a time.

Practical Hints.

It is one duty of ministers and teachers to warn both rulers and people against the plots and stratagems of the enemy.

A true man of God often wields a power in the nation greater than that of its king.

God knows every secret thought and feeling and hope of the heart. There are times when the enemies of the truth seem to be on the point of victory, and good people are discouraged.

God's people are surrounded by countless defenders. They that are for the Christian are always more and greater than those that are against him.

All the forces of the universe are with God's people, and against his enemies. And God has promised that they shall work good to those that love him.

There is vastly more in the world, in life, in the Bible, in nature, every where, than appears to the ordinary sight.

One of our most earnest prayers should be that God would open our eyes, that we may see more in his Word, in his love, in his promises, in life, in nature, in Christ, in Providence.

It is not permitted us to pray for harm to our enemies; but we may pray that God will make them powerless, and show them his might.

W. C. T. Union.

OUR MOTTO.—If God be for us, who can be against us.

The Best Methods of Self-Culture For Our Young Girls.

BY MRS. MARGARET BOTTOME.

I would rather write to girls than of them, but I must keep to the text you have given me, and I would like to answer so that some girls should be helped. I read some time ago this sentence; "Blessed be drudgery, the secret of all culture." The writer said: "You know all Beatitudes are based on something hard to do or to be. Blessed are the meek. Is it easy to be meek? Blessed are the pure in heart. Is that so very easy? Blessed are they who mourn; blessed are they who hunger and thirst [who starve] after righteousness." So the writer thought that this new beatitude of blessed drudgery fell in with the rest, and in thinking it over I see much of truth in it. The very things we think we must get rid of in order to be cultured are the very things that make us cultured. And it seems to me we are apt to save our girls or would like to save them from the very things that are necessary to the perfection of character. Take self-denial, for instance; there can be no perfection without self-denial, and yet most mothers will deny themselves to save the daughters from the very thing they need most of all.

After the experience and observation of my life, if I had a daughter to educate, I would make most of self-denial in trying to develop her character. Then I should make so much of thoroughness. There is much danger in not being thorough. It is not so much what we do as how well we do it; "the angel aim" in what we do. I stood a long time this past summer before a picture, in the Spanish gallery in the Louvre of a kitchen in which all at work were angels. One tall angel was putting the dishes up on the dresser; another angel was cutting up a fowl, and little angels were shelling peas and preparing vegetables for the dinner. I learned more than one lesson as I stood before that picture. I thought of "Thy will be done on earth even as it is done in heaven," and of course an angel would do well. I am sorry to have to use myself as a warning, but I can remember when a girl of commanding new things, and then not finishing them. I would rush up to a very indulgent mother, exclaiming, "O, mother, there is the loveliest pattern down the street for an ottoman you ever saw, cannot I commence to work on one?" My gentle mother said more than once, "Have you finished the other piece you commenced, daughter?" No, but I was tired of that, I would finish it sometime. Now I wish my mother had been severe and said, "No, my child, you must finish what you commence."

There is a very old-fashioned word which I wish would come into fashion again; it may not appear attractive, but the comfort of a lifetime is in it, the old word *duty*. How old-fashioned it sounds, and yet how refreshing to hear a young girl say, "I think it is my duty, and that settles it."

I see more and more in this verse that our daughters may be as polished stones after the similitude of a palace. It means to me individuality, independence. A palace is never one of a row of houses; a palace stands by itself. There are rows of houses in New York so much alike that you are in danger of going into somebody else's house instead of your own. And the trouble with so many of our young girls is that they want to be just like some one else; they dress like some one else; they belong to a row. Now, what we want among our young women

is palaces standing on one's convictions and acting them out.

I am not the woman I would like to be. I see my imperfections clearly enough; but what I am I owe to the determination I had as a young woman—that I would go the way that seemed right to me, though I should be called peculiar, and that was a very hard thing for me in those days to be called. I would say to every young woman, "Have the courage to be yourself." I would say to each, Daughter, be yourself; deny the selfish self in you; what you undertake to do do it thoroughly; have much of the spirit of this one thing I do; be determined to do your duty as you see it. See with all the advantages that our young women now have, as you enter on the last decade of this century, you will develop a nobler type of womanhood than the world has ever seen, and which the world will need in the twentieth century, now so near to us.

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