THE SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JULY 1

John the Baptist,. Matthew 3: 1-17; 11: 2-15; Mark 6: 14-29; Luke 1: 5-80; John 1: 6-37. Golden Text—Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people.—Luke 1: 68.

LESSON SETTING—After the silence of four centuries, the voice of the prophet is heard in the land. John the Baptist is thirty years of age. He has been trained in a godly home and later in the quietness of the wilderness. Now God calls him to his great task.

I. THE MESSAGE OF JOHN, LUKE 3:3-6.

V. 3. *He came.* He responds immediately to the call. He had spent many years of communion in the rocky solitudes skirting the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea. Communion with God always ends in commission, and meditation always ends in a message. *The country about Jordan.* John labors, not in the city, but in the open country about the river Jordan. It was an accessible region, and the other evangelists show the people flocking to his ministry,—priests from Jerusalem, publicans from Jericho, peasants from Galilee, and soldiers on the march. His message is arresting and drawing. *Preaching the baptism of repentance.* With the Jews, baptism was connected with the consecration of priests, the purification of the ceremonially unclean, and the admission of Gentile converts to Judaism. John makes it a rite for all without exception. He demands it for a reason that applies to all,—sin. He administers it under a condition of heart that all must fulfill,—repentance. He makes it symbolize a common blessing that all must seek,—forgiveness. His message is a spiritual message. There must be a moral and spiritual preparation for the coming of the kingdom.

Vs. 4-6. *As it is written.* The words of Isaiah are quoted to show that John is a pioneer preparing a way for the coming of the King's chariot. The filling of the valleys, the levelling of the mountains, the straightening of the road, represent the spiritual changes that must take place if the kingdom is to mean anything or bring anything to Israel. *All flesh shall see.* The Gentile as well as the Jew is to share in the blessing of the kingdom.

II. THE COURAGE OF JOHN, 3:7, 8.

Vs. 7, 8. *O generation of vipers.* Matthew tells us that these words were applied in particular to the Pharisees who came seeking baptism without the real motive. Their motives were personal, official and selfish. *Begin not to say . . We have Abraham.* They thought that the kingdom would come to them as Jews, the children of Abraham, and forgot that they must come to the kingdom as penitents. *God is able of these stones.* Race, descent, blood, count for nothing. Heart, spirit, character are everything.

III. THE GREATNESS OF JOHN, 7:24-28.

Vs. 24-26. *When the messengers of John were departed.* Herod had cast John into prison because of his bold rebuke. The dampness, darkness and solitariness had affected the soul of this child of the desert. In his doubt he sent two of his disciples to ask Christ if he were really the Messiah. Jesus' answer is to tell John the work of mercy he was carrying on. *Began to speak . . concerning John.* Jesus had no word of rebuke for John. John had at least the courage to carry his doubt about Jesus to Jesus Himself. *What went ye out . . to see? A reed.* The people were not to think that John's question betrayed any weakness of character. He was no weakling bending before the will of king, priest or multitude. *A man clothed in soft raiment;* a fawning courtier clothed in silk and saying smooth things,—a striking contrast to John's rough dress, rugged speech and simple life and fearless thinking. *A prophet;* a man who speaks the word of God. To be a prophet of God was high honor. But Jesus asserts of John that he was more than a prophet. He was a prophet of whom the prophets had spoken.

Vs. 27, 28. *Behold, I send my messenger.* Other prophets had spoken of the coming of the kingdom and the king, but it was John's supreme honor to declare that the kingdom had come and to say, "Behold the Lamb of God." *There is not a greater prophet than John.* Both in character and mission John is supreme. Note the climax in the words of Christ,—not a bending reed, but an immovable rock; not a bowing, self-seeking courtier, but a real upstanding man; not a prophet, but more than a prophet,—a forerunner; not a great man among great men, but the greatest above the great. *Least in the kingdom . . is greater than he;* not greater in character, but greater in being able to grasp, through Christ, a truer idea of the kingdom, and greater because, while John pointed to the king, the least in the kingdom followed the king himself.

APPLICATION.

Among the many fine things which might be said about John the Baptist, we may quote the following:

His Courage. John came among men not as a reed shaken by the wind, swayed first this way, then that, according to the opinions of men. Long meditation had made his principles fixed, and even if he stood alone, he was courageous and outspoken.

His Modesty. John recognized that he was but the forerunner of Jesus. There are three recorded occasions on which he bore testimony to the Messiah. First, when a deputation was sent to him from Jerusalem by the Jewish authorities (see John 1:19-27); second, when he pointed Jesus out to his own disciples as the Messiah (John 1:29-34); third, when he rebuked the attempt of his disciples to stir up rivalry between Jesus and himself (John 3:26-36). There is nothing which shows the true greatness of John more than his attitude towards Jesus. He came to exalt another. He had no thought for his own advancement.

His Perplexity. From his prison John sent two of his disciples to Jesus with the question: "Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?" Luke 7:19. Some one has called this "the perplexity of the loyal-hearted." Jesus had not proved to be just the kind of Saviour that John had expected. Where he had expected severity, Jesus had shown gentleness. Where he had looked for scathing denunciation, Jesus had shown mercy. It is pleasing to note that whatever doubts John had, still he looked to Jesus for light. He recognized Christ as a very present help in trouble and turned to him for guidance in a very natural way.

Christ's Estimate of John. As soon as John's disciples had departed, Jesus began to praise John. It may have been that some who heard John's question may have been unfavorably impressed, and disposed to think of him as a waverer. Jesus corrects that impression. John had often borne testimony to Jesus, now Jesus gladly bears testimony to the worth of John. Men are often praised to their faces and blamed when their backs are turned. Jesus does the opposite in the case of John. John, he assures them, was no reed shaken with the wind. There was no fickleness about him; nor was there any complaint because of the hardships he was enduring. Jesus makes clear that in God's sight, John had attained to real greatness.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

Our Feathered Friends—Golden-Winged Woodpecker.

BY LEREINE BALLANTYNE.

This is the season of the year many folks go househunting. When we see a house which suits them, they usually look at the outside and then go inside to look around. This is not the case with Mr. and Mrs. Woodpecker. When they see what might be a good home, they stand outside and hammer at the walls till everyone in the locality wonders what all the racket is about. You see, they hammer the walls to make sure they are strong and durable. Some times they beat the tattoo from sheer exuberance of joy, however, just as the robin sings his spring song for us.

The Golden-winged Woodpecker, or Flicker, as he is sometimes called, is a very beautiful bird, wearing a coat of golden brown striped with black, and across the top of his head is a bit of brilliant red. They make their nest in holes which they dig in dead poles or trees, and it is a well known fact that tree swallows, fly-catchers, and other species use their old nests, which they find very comfortable, since they are unable to bore one out for themselves, not having a bill like the flicker's, constructed for the purpose. The feet of the woodpecker help in a remarkable way when he is tapping at trees. He has three toes in front, and a hind toe so well developed and as long as the middle front toe, and tipped with an unusually long claw by which he balances himself and can stand against a vertical surface with ease.

Unlike other woodpeckers, the flicker feeds upon ground insects, his particular delicacy being ants. They may take a little fruit in some localities, but if driven away or destroyed, the insects they feed upon would do far more damage than these beautiful feathered friends.

Getting in Harmony.

In the good old days of pioneer farming the scythe was a very important piece of farm equipment. Even now we can hark back and see the haymaker as he completed the swath at the end of the field, bring the heel of the scythe to his breast, pull from the hip pocket a worn whetstone, and fit the keen blade for another round.

At first the stone clangs against the side of the blade. Shortly one can detect a slight musical note creeping into the grinding noise. Then in a moment the iron and the stone lose their clamor entirely and the tone of the one becomes exactly harmonized to the tone of the other. There is music and then the haymaker knows that it is ready to lay another swath with the least muscular effort.

It would appear, in a general way, that this is what we should seek in life, to get ourselves working harmoniously with those about us. Let the clangs knock off the superstitions and suspicions, and then, keep on in faith and hope till our life has been adjusted to that of our neighbor, and our community is adjusted to other communities. It is simply another way of repeating in concert the old, but much broken, golden rule.

Canada's wheat production increased by 70 per cent. in 10 years.

Their Majesties King Geo. V. and Queen Mary

Virginia's Different Dominion Day

BY MABEL MARTIN

"Don't waste any more breath! I'm going to stay home. I'll have a different Dominion Day this year, if I have to sleep all day. Every year since I can remember we have gone to Mayfield. You couldn't drag me there this year." And Virginia Bolton looked obstinate, daring her family to oppose her.

"But Virginia," remonstrated her younger sister Myrtle, "there'll be young folks there from all over the county. Maybe you'd meet someone new you'd like."

At this Walter laughed. When he wished to exasperate Virginia he told her she was unmarried at twenty-eight, not because she liked her teaching and valued her independence, but because she seldom met men other than those with whom she had grown up.

"Just think, Virgie," he admonished, "you might meet your fate. You ought to go as a matter of principle."

"And you ought to stop teasing your sister as a matter of principle," placidly retorted Mrs. Bolton. "Of course, Virginia, stay home if you really want to. But won't you be lonesome with just Uncle Jerry? There's to be a fine parade this year, speeches in the grove. And special speakers coming from the city. You'd like to hear them."

"Not I, mother dear," replied Virginia. "I can't think of anything I'd hate worse. So we'll call it settled. And Uncle Jerry and I will keep house and 'tend the chickens."

Tending the chickens was a stock joke with the Boltons, since it was Uncle Jerry's invariable excuse for staying home from festivities and dozing on the south porch with his pipe and favorite farm paper.

So it happened that on the morning of a cloudless Dominion Day the Boltons packed themselves into the surrey with their lunch baskets. Virginia waved a gay farewell from the steps of the porch. She had planned a lazy day with a new book and a pantry stocked with left-over goodies.

"It'll rain," commented Uncle Jerry.

"Nonsense, not a cloud in the sky," said Virginia.

"Can't help it. Allus does rain on Dominion Day an' allus will," and Uncle Jerry settled himself and his pipe in the old cushioned rocker. There was an imposing pile of magazines and books dealing with the care of chickens on the table at his elbow. But whether Uncle Jerry read a great deal and dozed a little, or dozed a great deal and read a little, was a mooted question in the family.

Presently Virginia took her book and a two-pound box of chocolates to the hammock under the maple tree and near the clump of lilacs that had made spring a glory in the Bolton front yard.

Virginia's thin dress was cool and comfortable. The hammock swung lazily. The chocolates were all that could be desired and so was the book. Virginia sighed contentedly. Soon her eyes were shut and she was dreaming of floating along on one of the puffy clouds that were piled whitely near the western horizon.

Suddenly Virginia dreamed that she fell from the cloud into the chicken yard, and awoke, really to hear a fearful squawk by a real hen. An automobile was coming rapidly along the road and the hen had decided that her only safety lay in getting home. There was a grinding of brakes, a series of explosions and with a snort of defiance, the machine came to a stop in the grassy gully a foot or so from the fence.

The man who had been driving leaped from the car and walked around it, looking it over. He made a number of remarks, half under his breath. Virginia could not hear all of them, which she thought was perhaps fortunate but, after serious investigation he began to look wildly about the landscape. He did not see Virginia but he did see that the house door was open and he started up the path with that air of determination and fine carelessness of convention which characterizes motorists in trouble.

Virginia saw that he was young. His brown hair clung damply to his heated forehead. His face was streaked with black. His hands were begrimed unspeakably. His linen duster was torn at the pockets. Altogether, he had a ferocious aspect. But Virginia was used to such visitors since she lived on a main road. She knew them for a mad but harmless tribe. Her glance struggled between a proper demureness and definite amusement. His face took on a deeper shade of red.

"If you heard me—um—talking, I hasten to apologize. It's serious. I'm due to make a speech at Mayfield at one o'clock and it's nearly one now."

"Can't you fix it?" Her glance sought the disabled roadster.

"Not without repair parts I haven't with me. Maybe your father has them. What kind of a car does he drive?"

"Horses. He thinks them more trustworthy in the long run," said Virginia coolly. She felt cool and very impish

"How about a train?"

"Three miles, and no train to Mayfield until five," Virginia responded, adding in a tone that she hoped would penetrate his armor: "You see we are entirely out of the world. You'd better telephone to Mayfield and tell them you can't get there."

"A telephone!" he cried, surprised and somewhat cheered. "Sure enough. Judge Curran went over from the city this morning on the train. They can get him to speak. Lead me to the telephone!"

Virginia was still more piqued by the stranger's extravagant welcome of the telephone. Convinced that she did not like having her quiet day disturbed by a wild-looking young man who demanded cars and repair parts and trains and telephones, and who looked with scorn upon country people, she grudgingly indicated the open front door of the house and said in a tone of edged politeness:

"Walk in and make yourself at home. The screen's not latched. The telephone's right there, in the hall."

Her manner at last made an impression. The young man said stiffly:

"Awfully sorry to inconvenience you. I must telephone but after that I won't trouble you. My name is Atwater. Donald Atwater. I was to speak at Mayfield. After all, you have some responsibility. "Why didn't you call your chicken off?"

"It may have been our chicken," retorted Virginia, "but why didn't you stop before you got to it? It made noise enough."

He turned toward the house without answering. He had been driving mechanically, with his thoughts far from autos and farther from chickens. He looked so ludicrous with the black streaks decorating that expression of wounded dignity.

Virginia relented and called softly: "Mr. Atwater, you can get Mayfield by calling Mayfield 226 and the operator there will find a way to put your message through. It is altogether too bad!"

He made no sign that he had heard and disappeared into the house. After an interval he came out and without a glance in Virginia's direction he reached the roadster.

In the hammock Virginia swung idly; in the road Donald Atwater appeared to work energetically on his car. In the west there was a low rumbling of distant thunder. Virginia looked up as the hurrying clouds obscured the sun. Uncle Jerry, who had comfortably dozed the morning through, appeared at the corner of the porch and gazed in some surprise at the roadster by the fence.

"Goin' to rain, Virgie," he called. "I said it ud rain. Better bring in your young man to eat. 'Nofful storm comin." Then he hobbled to the house.

Virginia glanced toward the roadster. The "bumptious creature" was putting down the hood of his engine and wrapping up his tool kit. He looked rather forlorn and somewhat like a sulky boy. Virginia gathered up her chocolates and her book and went swiftly across the grass to the gate.

"Mr. Atwater, I really beg your pardon. Won't you come into the house. It's going to pour. Er—my Uncle invites you to have lunch. Surely you are hungry enough by this time to forgive me for my rudeness?"

The combination of a promised lunch, the rain and Virginia's really disarming penitence were too much for Donald Atwater. Like two friendly children they ran up the path and reached the house as the storm broke in a furious onslaught.

An hour later the storm was over. The sun slanted through the dining-room. They were making a hearty luncheon of which the main ingredients were a huge platter of cold chicken, a crisp apple pie and a three-storey layer chocolate cake.

In the cool of the evening the service station at Mayfield responded to a telephone call for help and the roadster started, ignominiously towed, to finish its journey. Its owner, after slightly fervent good-byes, went with it, intending to catch a night train for Girton from Mayfield.

Virginia was left sitting in the hammock in the summer night. Walter came toward her from the gate, having seen their guest disappear over the hill.

"Some Dominion Day for you, all right!" he remarked inelegantly. "If capturing the main speaker of the day and keeping him to yourself while the crowd went without, isn't 'different,' I don't know what is."

"You know he couldn't help it!" retorted Virginia warmly.

"Sure he couldn't help it!" responded Walter. "Who can stand against a hen—or even a chicken? Didn't act much as if he wanted to help it. I'd give a cooky to know, though, just what's the matter with his car."

"Maybe you'll have a chance to ask him Sunday," said Virginia kindly. "He's coming out. He asked to call properly."

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Fruit Crops in Canada.

Last year, according to the Fruit and Vegetable Crop Report of the Dominion Fruit Branch, a bumper crop was harvested of practically all varieties of cherries, plums, peaches, and pears. The plum crop was particularly heavy, averaging almost 300 per cent. over that of 1921, and the peach crop in the Niagara district of Ontario was not only one of the heaviest on record, but also of excellent quality. The production of apples was less in every province in 1922 than in 1921, excepting only in Quebec, where there was an increase of over 75,000 barrels, as an offset against a total deficiency in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Ontario of 227,778 barrels. British Columbia was shy 172,449 boxes, the numbers being 3,000,000 boxes in 1922 compared with 3,172,449 in 1921. Ontario produced a large crop of all small fruits, with the exception of raspberries, which suffered from winter injury and later on from disease. In British Columbia the small fruit crop was rather less in 1922 than in 1921, strawberries and raspberries both suffering winter injury. The Report states that on the Canadian markets the wholesale prices throughout last year were low, mainly due to the large shipments of inferior quality low-grade stock. All the provinces report a backward season this year, but trees and plants are generally stated to have wintered well.

Canadian Cattle in England.

Dominion Live Stock Branch cables dated the last day of May report that 445 Canadian cattle sold at Birkenhead mostly at 23c per pound and that a few of the choicest commanded 24c, in sink. Shipments through Canadian Eastern ports during the week amounted to 2,446 cattle.

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ISSUE No. 26—'23.