

Our Weekly Sermons

By Celebrated Divines.

Written specially for the LADIES PICTORIAL WEEKLY.

The Queen of Sheba.

(1. Kings x; 1-13, Matt. xii; 4-2.)

The Queen of Sheba was one of the celebrated ladies of antiquity. In addition to the favorable notices which we have of her in the Bible, a great many legends and traditions have come down to us from remote times respecting her. In the Koran of the Mohammedans, for example, there is a curious chapter about her. These legends and traditions prove, at least, that her fame extended far and wide throughout the old nation of the Eastern world. And it is a very remarkable fact that her visit to Solomon is the only event in the history of that famous Hebrew monarch that is recorded in the New Testament. The place called Sheba of which this celebrated lady was Queen was undoubtedly situated in the Southern part of Arabia. Josephus, the Jewish Historian, says she was Queen of Egypt and Ethiopia. But this is certainly a mistake on the part of Josephus. The Kingdom of Sheba derived its name from Sheba, one of the descendants of Shem, who settled in South Arabia, as we learn from the Book of Genesis, and the Arabic geographers. This corresponds with what our Saviour says of the place where this distinguished sovereign reigned. He speaks of her as "the Queen of the South," and says that she came from the uttermost part of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. Her territory would thus be South of Palestine, and at the Southern extremity of the Peninsula of Arabia—the region in which the well known town Aden is now situated. When I was sailing down the Red Sea, and through the Gulf of Aden, on my recent trip around the globe, I looked wistfully at the Southern shores of Arabia, and I felt satisfied that I was gazing on the territory over which the distinguished Queen of Sheba reigned in the days of old. If we needed any further confirmation of the point, we have it in the presents which the illustrious visitor brought to the Hebrew monarch; spices, frankincense, gold and precious stones in great abundance and variety. All the old writers who have given us descriptions of the Southern part of Arabia represent it as abounding in ancient times in these productions.

But it is of this famous Queen herself of whom we now particularly speak. And glancing at the leading features of her character as they are represented in the inspired narrative we notice as the first, that she was evidently of a thoughtful, enquiring, turn of mind. The most ungallant reader cannot detect anything that is light and frivolous in her character as she appears before us in the Biblical Record. The questions which she came to ask Solomon were not light and frivolous questions. They were not even mere riddles, or puzzles, that might amuse the fancy, and while away the tedious hours, without enlightening the mind, or improving the heart. The inspired historian says of them that they were "hard questions." They were important and difficult questions which indicated a capacious intellect, and a noble heart. They had reference, doubtless, to some of the great problems of life and death and immortality which have exercised thoughtful minds in all ages. She evidently enjoyed great temporal prosperity. This is clearly seen by the costly presents which she brought to her royal instructor. She had all the wealth, all the honor, all the pleasure, which this world can give to the greatest favorites of fortune. But all these possessions and pleasures did not satisfy the deep longings of her soul. She yearned for more light on the great problems of life, and death, and immortality that exercised her intellect, and agitated her heart.

This thoughtful, enquiring, turn of mind is an admirable characteristic of any individual man or woman—sovereign or subject. Nothing more distinguishes one human being from another than this power of thought which our benevolent Creator has given to us in varying degrees. Isaac Watts, the hymn writer, was small in statue and delicate in appearance, but he said truly,

"Were I so tall to reach the pole,
Or grasp the ocean with my span,
I must be measur'd by my soul;
The mind's the standard of the man."

And he might have added with equal truth; of the woman also. And certainly in a complete catalogue of the celebrities who have been most distinguished for their power of thought we will find a goodly proportion of the fair sex. In a proof of the assertion I may mention, on the other side of the Atlantic, the names of Caroline Frys, Felicia D. Hemans, Joanna Baillie, Mary Howitt, Mary Montagu, Mrs. Browning, Eliza Cook, Hannah More, Francis Ridley Havergal; on this side of the Atlantic, Emily Judson, Lydia H. Sigourney, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Phoebe Palmer.

The energy of character displayed by the far-famed Queen of Sheba is quite as conspicuous as her thoughtful, enquiring, turn of mind. She was as energetic as she was contemplative. Her determination and energy of character were sufficient to carry her through all the obstacles which she had to encounter before she could hear for herself Solomon's solution of her perplexing problems. She had heard in her own land the fame of the great Hebrew monarch. The trading ships of Solomon brought the account of his wealth, and his wisdom, to the shores of many lands—to the shores of the kingdom of Sheba. The inspired historian particularly says that she had "heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord"—concerning the name of the great God who had given a revelation of His being and will in the Hebrew nation. This was something entirely new to her. In her own land she had only the dim torch-light of Nature to guide her in her search after truth. And she hoped that Solomon, living in the clearer light of the supernatural revelation which Jehovah had given him, would be able to answer all the hard questions which exercised her intellect and agitated her heart. But it was no easy task for her to go

in person to visit the Hebrew sage and obtain from him the desired information. The distance, as the crow flies, from the southern shores of Arabia to the City of Jerusalem would be about 1400 miles. To us who live in an age of fast and easy travel on land and sea, that distance means only a pleasant outing. But to the Arabian Queen it meant many days, aye weeks, of tiresome traveling with a long, slow-moving train of camels over sandy plains, and rugged mountains, and unbridged rivers, rarely varied by a verdant oasis, or a fertile valley. But her energy of character was fully equal to the arduous undertaking. It carried her safely through all intervening obstacles from her home in the distant South into the presence of the wise King, Solomon.

It is sometimes thought, and even said, that energy of character is the exclusive heritage of the sterner sex. Lord Lytton has said, "A woman's noblest station is retreat." But this oft quoted statement must be received with considerable modification. In the quietude of home, and the abode of grief, woman is doubtless a mistering angel in a noble sphere of duty. But when occasion requires, she often exhibits equal aptitude for more public and arduous spheres of usefulness. When Napoleon was told that there was no road over the Alps by which he could lead his army into Italy he heroically replied; "If there is no road I will make one." But I think Deborah was quite as heroic as Napoleon when she stood at the head of the Israelite army and vanquished the powerful Canaanites led on by Jabin and Sisera. And so was Maria Theresa of Austria of whom Carlyle has said that she was "most brave, high and pious minded; beautiful, too, radiant with good nature, though of a temper that will easily catch fire." And so was Joan of Arc, "the Maid of Orleans," and many others of the fair sex equally famed in history for indomitable energy and perseverance in the accomplishment of noble purposes. We cannot but admire the energy of character attributed to the heroine of Sheba in the inspired narrative.

Her teachable disposition, in my estimation, is quite as commend-



Thomas Cumming

able as her enquiring turn of mind, or her energy of character. She was Queen of an empire, and the most intelligent individual, evidently, in her realm; but when she found a teacher who was able to instruct her she sat at his feet with the docility of a little child, and drank in with avidity the words of wisdom that flowed from his lips. The inspired narrative says, "when she was come to Solomon she communed with him of all that was in her heart, and Solomon told her all her questions; there was not anything hid from the King, which he told her not." We cannot speak too highly of the teachable disposition thus manifested by this Sabaeen Queen—especially her desire and willingness to be taught "concerning the name of the Lord." The most intelligent men and women of our race are not those whose education, in their own judgment, is complete—who have reached the lofty heights of sinless perfection and absolute knowledge, and have no more need to enter the schools of earth. Those who have made the highest attainments in any department of learning, and even in the school of Christ, are still scholars—disciples, still willing to be taught—still eagerly in search of more light, more knowledge. The religion of the Bible, of which Solomon was an expounder in his day, is a religion that demands study, investigation. Its Divine Author says to us "Search the Scriptures." And I for one have very great sympathy with an enquirer who candidly acknowledges that he meets with doubts and difficulties in his search after truth. Honest doubt is, I believe, the first step on the road to the palace of truth. But I could hold up this noble Queen of Sheba as a shining example to all who are anxious to attain to a fuller, clearer, knowledge of the great truths which God has revealed to us in His world. Though occupying a high position in society, and already intelligent beyond many, she was still teachable as a little child, and did not consider it beneath her dignity to receive further instruction in religious knowledge.

Let me ask you in conclusion to notice her high estimate of the privileges and advantages enjoyed by Solomon and his people. Read if you please what is said on this point as it is written in the

tenth chapter of the First Book of Kings, from the 4th to the 9th verse. No language could express more clearly her high appreciation of the advantages and privileges enjoyed by Solomon and his people, as compared with the advantages and privileges which she and her people enjoyed in Arabia. Especially did she appreciate highly the opportunity of knowing and worshipping the one living and true God as compared with the idolatry that was practised in her own country. And of course we must bear in mind that this was the time in Solomon's history when he was in the height of his piety and prosperity, and before he began to wander away from the paths of rectitude and duty. This characteristic of the Sabaeen Queen, like the others which I have mentioned is very noteworthy. When the celebrated Hugh Miller was known only as "the stone mason of Cromarty, one of his companions twitted him as being a hero-worshipper. The pungent and prophetic reply of the future great geologist was: "No man ever became great who was not an admirer of greatness." The Queen of Sheba's admiration of the greatness of Solomon, and his surroundings is an evidence that she had in herself the elements of true greatness. And has not the observation a lesson in it for ourselves? All the privileges and advantages enjoyed by Solomon, and his people cannot bear a moment's comparison with the privileges and the advantages which we enjoy as a Christian people. The Church and the world have made immense progress during the nearly 3000 years that have rolled away since the days of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The great King in Jerusalem lived merely in the dim twilight; we live in the clear, unclouded, gospel day. We may say, especially as compared with multitudes who have not a tithe of our privileges and advantages, "The lines are fallen unto us in pleasant places; yea we have a goodly heritage." We have our Sabbaths, and our sanctuaries, and our schools, and our colleges, and our Bibles, and benevolent institutions, and the means of grace, and the hopes of glory. And certainly the beautiful example of the Queen of the South may well remind us of the deep gratitude which we owe to our bountiful Benefactor for the special tokens of His favour which he has bestowed on us. The great English poet has truly said:

"Sharper than a serpent's tooth it is,
To have a thankless child."

The true spirit of gratitude disposes us to say, in view especially of our religious privileges.

"Lord I ascribe it to thy grace,
And not to chance as others do;
That I was born of Christian race,
And not a heathen, or a Jew."

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

Rev. Thomas Cumming.

The Rev. Thomas Cumming, of Truro, N. S., was born at Stellarton, Pictou Co., N. S., about half a century ago. This is the native county of Sir William Dawson of Montreal, the scholarly principal of McGill College, and also of Principal Grant of Queen's University, Kingston. The latter and the subject of the present sketch were school-mates in boyhood's early days. The father of Principal Grant was the first teacher the boys had. Mr. Cumming studied for the Ministry at the Presbyterian College, Halifax, where he was distinguished as an able and earnest student. After completing his curriculum of studies, he travelled extensively. For two years he visited the leading colleges in Scotland and the United States. During that time also he spent several months in and about the Queen City of the Dominion—Toronto. Then came the time for work and the young minister was called to Sharon Church, Stellarton, his native village. There he labored zealously for nine years. Afterwards he was for nearly three years pastor of Calvin Church, Montreal, as successor to Professor Scrimger, when the latter was appointed to a professional chair in the University of that city. The people, however, of his native province were not content to let him remain there, and earnestly urged him to return. Consequently he relinquished his city charge and went back to the home of his boyhood. Truro, the beautiful and prosperous town of Nova Scotia, has been ever since the scene of his zealous and clerical labors. His church has the familiar name of St. Andrew's and the congregation is large and flourishing. Two years ago he had a vacation in company with his younger brother, also a minister. They travelled round the globe, "My special object" says the Rev. Mr. Cumming about this journey, "was a visit to the Lands of the Bible, particularly Palestine and Egypt. But I enjoyed the whole round trip immensely." The *Presbyterian Record* for the Dominion for '91 contains an article for each month of the year on Palestine. This is from the pen of Mr. Cumming.—ED.

In this series have already appeared:

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| " 16th, " | Rev. W. Rainsford, D.D., New York. |
| " 23rd, " | Rev. Joseph Wild, D.D., Toronto. |
| " 30th, " | Rev. S. M. Milligan, B.A., Toronto. |
| Feb. 6th, " | Rev. O. C. S. Wallace, Toronto. |
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| May 7th, " | Rev. William Henry Warriner, M.A., B.D., Montreal. |