

Light from the East

BLOOD THICKER THAN WATER—Seldom has family connection counted for so much as among the early Hebrews. They were like their cousins the Arabs. The family was closely knit together and stood off from all outsiders. You could determine the strength of a family by counting heads; you could reckon the influence of the family head by counting his dependents and counting his cattle and his sheep, Gen. 32 : 1-8. Towards outsiders duties hardly existed; Abraham was generous to Lot, but he would put himself under no obligation to the king of Sodom, ch. 14 : 21-24. If an outsider wronged a member of the family he wronged the family, and it fell to the family to exact vengeance.

This private or family vengeance was very difficult to curtail when the kingdom was established and the king's justice to all subjects alike had to be put in its place. Joab broke through the restraint, 2 Sam. 3 : 22-27. What obstinate resistance family loyalty can offer, is seen in the case of Mohammed. By his preaching of doom and destruction he made all the head men of Mecca his enemies. They tried to stop him, but they did not dare kill him; they feared his family. They boycotted them, but Abu Talib, his uncle and head of the family, stood loyally by him. He was no convert to his nephew's teaching, but he would not yield. The family was almost starved out but persecution had not the staying power of family loyalty. In time, the boycott broke down.

THE GEOGRAPHY LESSON

[SEE SKETCH MAP, LESSON I.]

The Plain (literally the "Round" or "Oval") of the Jordan was the approximately oval or oblong basin into which the depression through which the Jordan flows, expands as it approaches the north end of the Dead Sea. It must also, if the Cities of the Plain are rightly placed at the south end of the Dead Sea, have included the Dead Sea itself. It is one of the most fertile regions in the East. The streams from the hills, which once used to water it, have now shrunk, owing to the destruction of the trees, but wherever they are used for irrigation, the heat, moisture and rich soil produce astonishing results. Three crops of different cereals or vegetables in one year are possible, and, indeed, are not uncommon. In this plain Jericho was situ-

ated, a little to the north of the Dead Sea. This city is described as "the mistress of a great palm forest, woods of balsam, and very rich gardens." Her dates and balsam were famous all over the world. Her year was one long summer. There has been much disputing among geographers as to whether the Cities of the Plain stood at the north end or the south end of the Dead Sea. Scholars, however, are pretty well agreed that they were at the south. Zoar, one of these cities, though all traces of it have now disappeared, was a well known place down to the Middle Ages, and references to it by later historians leave little doubt that it stood at the southeast corner of the Sea.

THE LESSON APPLIED

"Lot also . . . had flocks," etc., v. 5. Both men were rich, but riches affected them differently. What was Abram's stepping stone was the stumbling-block of Lot. While Abram daily drew nearer to God, Lot gradually pitched his tent toward Sodom. A minister one time went to see a rich hearer, and said, "I understand you are very dangerously situated." The man replied, "I am not aware of it." "I thought it probable you were not; and therefore I called upon you. I hear you are getting rich. Take care; for

this is the road by which the devil leads thousands to destruction." *Riches may be a means of grace or disgrace.*

"And there was a strife," v. 7. Dr. Hugh Black says, "When they were poor, uncle and nephew had no difficulty in keeping together and sharing one fortune. But wealth divided them, introduced friction and ultimately forced them to separate." "Look at a file of your sister's letters," says Thackeray, "and see how you clung to each other till you quarreled about the twenty pound legacy." *Pros-*