

## Pastor and People.

### GOLDEN GRAIN BIBLE READING.

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#### THE CONSCIENCE.

1. An Inherent and Essential Faculty in Man. Rom. 2 15.
2. A Faculty of Judgment. Eccl. 10.20., Jno. 8.9., Prov. 20.27.
3. May be Weak. 1 Cor. 8 7 10-12
4. May be Evil. Heb. 10.22.
5. May be Seared. 1 Tim. 4 2.
6. May be Defiled. Titus 1.15.
7. May be Good. 1 Tim. 1 5
8. May be Non-accusing. Acts 24.16.
9. May be Spirit Witnessing to it. Rom. 9.1.
10. May be Pure. Heb. 9.14., 1 Tim. 3.9
11. May be Perfect. Heb. 9.9., 1 Pet. 3.21.
12. Source of Joy, Harmony with it. 2 Cor. 1.12., Heb. 13.18.
13. Preaching Aims at it. 2 Cor. 4.2., 2 Cor. 5.11.
14. God Served with it. 2 Tim. 1.3
15. Unilluminated by the Spirit a False Guide. Acts. 23.1., Acts 26.9.

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### THE CHILDREN'S PULPIT.

EDITED BY M. H. C.

#### THE UNDERGROUND RIVER.

"There is that scattereth and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty." Proverbs xi. 24.

There was, and is still, in central Persia a desert province, where little rain falls, where corn will not grow, and where fruit trees are very rare. Yet there were people living in that province, who managed to provide themselves with daily food, and to be able to send their yearly tribute to the emperor Chosroes in southern Susa. Some of them kept flocks and herds, the flocks consisting of long-tailed sheep that fattened on the short thin grass which grew in tufts over the desert, and the herds of camels which grazed on the thorny plants and dry shrubs which dotted its level surface. Others were spinners and weavers, who made use of the sheep's wool and the camels' hair, turning them into cloth which they sold to their more fortunate neighbours. There were fishermen too who dwelt on the shores of a great lake without visible inlet or outlet. Its waters came underground from the northern mountains, and made their way southward through a similar hidden channel. A few hunters lay in wait for the lions and other wild animals that roamed over the sands in search of their prey, and for deer and goats on which they feasted. From time to time, the people drive down their flocks of sheep and herds of camels, the latter carrying bales of woollen and hair stuffs, rugs, and skins and dried fish, and brought back with them corn, wine, oil, and fruit, with other good things which their desert province did not produce. Many came back too with their hearts full of envy of those who lived in a more favoured country, the land of which was a great fertile garden watered by streams that flowed through scenes of beauty down towards the salt waters of the Persian Gulf. Why, they asked, should we be poor and they rich, seeing we are all subjects of the same great king? Kobad, the keeper of the emperor's camels was not one of these.

Karun was the governor of Cashan, and to him the people carried their complaints. They said they did not mind sending the emperor his tribute, but would willingly send more if their province would produce it. What they did mind was having to send away for corn to eat, and even for fodder for the very animals they reared. They wanted to grow their own corn and vines and fruit trees, yes and even mulberry trees for rearing silk worms, and rose bushes for making essences. They wished to have everything they had need of in their own land and among themselves. They were tired of this everlasting trade in sheep, camels and fish, and the weary journeys bringing the exchange goods back. Karun desired to please the people, so that there might be no disturbance in Cashan. He thought he was wise, and so he was, but it was only penny wise. Sending for clever men, he asked them why his province was so poor and the others so rich. Kobad was one of those whom he asked, and he answered that Cashan was not a poor province; that there was not a beggar nor a needy person in the whole length and breadth of it. He told of other provinces where sheep and camels could not live at all, where there was no great lake well stocked with fish, but only sad looking hot streams that lost themselves in the desert sands, and in the midst of summer dried up altogether. But the others silenced Kobad, and said he did not know what he was talking about. Other provinces were enriched by the rivers and streams which flowed through them, watering the ground, and making it bring forth abundantly. And where did this water come from? No doubt, from their own country, and from the underground outflow of their great lake. Why should Cashan feed the rest of the world with living streams, and itself remain a desert wilderness?

Karun, and all the clever men who listened to the one that had thus spoken, except Kobad, thought his sayings very wise indeed, and called him the greatest political economist of the day. The governor already imagined his promise transformed into a field of great fertility and wealth, and saw himself called to Susa or Ctesiphon by the emperor and made chief ruler under him, as a reward for the marvellous transformation. Engineers were sent for, and ordered to inspect the

lake at its southern end, so as to find the subterranean channel that carried off its surplus waters. Long days they sought in vain, throwing various articles that would float into the lake and watching the current carry them away. When these articles arrived near the southern end they were caught in whirlpools, and suddenly vanished. One day, Kobad was on the shore, superintending the watering of the emperor's camels, when, leaning over the edge he heard a sound, as of water swiftly flowing, and, at the same time, saw a large fish appear, as if from nowhere, barely holding its own against a strong current, and then turn aside into an eddy, and rest. The governor was superintending the engineers, when the camel guard went up to him and told him where the underground passage was. Eagerly he came forward to the spot, and found Kobad's word true. The camel guard prayed him not to stop up the exit, but Karun would not listen to him, so Kobad marked the spot that he might know it again. Then the engineers came and took the dimensions of the hole, and prepared a great hewn stone with which to fit it exactly. The stone was lowered down with ropes and chains opposite the aperture in the ground, but, before it was slid forward into its place, Kobad dropped his staff of office bearing the hound mark of the emperor, as if by accident, into the water, which in a moment swept it away. Then the great stone was slid into the hole and the sound of the rushing torrent ceased.

There was great rejoicing in Cashan, when it was known that the treasure of the waters was now held in, and would no longer benefit distant provinces. This was increased when the lake began to rise and overflow its borders. Little by little it encroached upon the land, driving the fishers out of their huts, and compelling the keepers of sheep and camels to withdraw to dry ground far beyond their old stations. The best grass was under water, and even the camels gazed wistfully to where their favourite food was half submerged beneath the advancing tide. The animals could not drink now without wetting their feet, and the women had to wade far through the marshy sand to get clean water for their households. The engineers set labourers to work digging channels for watering the ground, but the dry sand beneath the surface sucked the moisture up and was none the better. The sun shone down upon the stagnant pools, and poisonous vapours from decaying vegetation and dead stranded fish filled the air, bringing sickness and death to many a home. The sheep and camels were stricken down with a new disease, their feet rotting off them as they walked, all but the camels that Kobad kept for the emperor, which he had removed to the northern end of the lake. When the wild beasts came to drink, there was no longer cover for the huntsmen, who dared not attack them in the open, and the fishermen with difficulty launched their boats and dragged their nets to shore through miles of swamp. The people of Cashan were starving, and cried pitifully to Karun for help. Still the waters kept increasing, driving back and back into still more desert places the emaciated creatures who had been looking for great prosperity, leaving their dwellings behind them, and painfully carrying away what they could of their property along with their sick and their little ones. Such distress had never been seen before in all the broad empire of Persia.

Karun sent messengers down to the provinces of the south for help, but they came back empty handed. Those who dwelt in them were as badly off in another way as the people of Cashan. Their rivers had suddenly dried up, and a great drought prevailed, so that the emperor had had to send to foreign lands for grain to save his people from starvation. The whole country was crying to God for mercy. Yet the lake showed no sign of relenting. The underground rivers from the northern hills continued to pour down into it their streams of rain and melted snow, until all Cashan became a sea with but a little sandy strip around its margin. Many of the inhabitants fled to other countries, where some perished in the northern cold and others were killed or made prisoners by barbarous tribes. There was still some high land left where Kobad and a few other wise men kept their herds and mourned over the desolation of the province. Once there was no poor man in it, now all were poor and wretched and miserable. Too late Governor Karun and his clever men saw their folly. The people no longer hailed them as political economists, but cursed them to their faces as the authors of all their misfortunes. And these were the very people who had envied the dwellers in the south, and had prayed for a change that should transform their desert province into a fertile land. They had water enough now and to spare, but the sandy desert with its bushes and tufts of grass, which they had despised, they now longed for with a great longing.

Karun did not know what to do. If he re-opened the channel, the emperor would know who had stored it, and perhaps punish the offender. If he allowed things to go on as they were, he would soon have no province to rule over, and certainly no tribute to send to his monarch. At length, he decided to take away the stone, and sent for his engineers. With difficulty large boats were pushed out over the miles of sandy marsh, and soundings made in the original lake. There was no current now, nothing to indicate where the old aperture was, and all landmarks had disappeared under the waters. Day after day, the engineers searched, and even through the long nights when the moon shone clear, but all to no avail. It seemed as if the whole population of the province must be driven out. The emperor's taxing officers came, but there was nothing for them. They returned empty handed to tell the doleful tale. When they arrived at Susa Chosroes had

in his hand the staff of a camel's warder, bearing his own royal mark upon it. It had been found in the dry bed of a river near the point at which its waters had once issued from the ground. He held it up before his courtiers and said, "The man who owned this staff and can send it back again through the same channel shall have my daughter to wife, and be second to me only in the empire." This he ordered the scribes to write down, and sent posts all over the north country to find the owner of the camel keeper's staff.

Circling round the great lake from the west, the messengers came at last to where Kobad kept the emperor's camels. He heard the proclamation, he saw the staff, and went forward to claim it as his. When he asked for large boats or barges, for long iron bars chisel pointed, and for heavy sledge hammers. The camel keepers manned the barges, and propelled them away to the old southern limit of the lake. After a long-voyage, they came to a spot where the tops of three water killed trees were to be seen, their long trunks being covered with the rising waters. These were Kobad's landmarks, and, searching about in their neighborhood, he discovered the anchor cord he had let down, with a stone at the bottom end, and a wooden float on the top. Fastening his two barges to the tree tops, he ordered the chisel pointed bars to be thrust against the rock wall far below. It was done, but the bars were too short even to touch the top of the rock. The stout wooden handles were fixed to them until they were long enough. Carefully, the workers probed lengthwise and crosswise to the chisel edge for a crack or flaw in the solid stone. When cracks were found, the men with the bars held them in position while others struck the hard wood handles with the heavy sledges. At both ends of the working barge the rock yielded beneath the blows, and the bars sank down inch by inch. A third crack was found at right angles to the other two and between them, and the rock at that point also yielded to the chisel edge and the heavy hammers' thud. Then, all of a sudden the three bars sank down out of the camel drivers' hands and they nearly went in after them. "Quick, quick," cried Kobad, "all of you get into this barge and row for your lives away to the Southern Shore!" The men jumped in, threw away sledges and the bars that remained, cut the rope that bound the barge to the trees, and rowed for dear life, leaving an awful whirlpool behind them, where the waters were being sucked down into their old channel. Standing up in the stern, Kobad lifted high his arm and flung his camel warder's staff into the water. Then, it was desperate work fighting against the strong current that flowed on every side towards the opening. At times the barge stood still, but, at length, it reached the overflowed land, and, with pole as well as oar, was brought to the gradually nearing bank.

Day after day the waters decreased, and the old familiar landmarks came into view. Stone houses that had survived the flood were reoccupied, and old pasture grounds revisited. The fishermen got their nets and boats into order for the work of other days. There was joy over all the north country, and even Karun's heart was somewhat comforted. In the south, Chosroes was told that the waters had come back again, and went forth in his chariot to witness this sight. A grand sight it was to behold the great billows surging southward towards the sea, their impetus so great that they had no time to spread themselves abroad over the river bed, and would not have until they touched the salt tide and were dammed back by its mightier power. As one proud wave dashed along it smote against a boulder in the channel, and from its crest was tossed, far out on the bank near the wheel of the emperor's chariot, the well known staff of the camel warder. There was rejoicing in the south as well as in the north, for the time of drought was over, and dreams of returning prosperity visited every soul. The greatest officer of state was sent northward after the envoys with a royal chariot and many horsemen and players of music to bring back in triumph the hero of the hour. They found Kobad superintending his camel drivers, and the governor Karun among the envoys, claiming credit for the opening of the waters. The envoys had not been on the lake and, therefore, could not say from their own experience that his story was not true. So the great officer took both Karun and Kobad back with him in the royal chariot, and, as there were two claimants, he could not clothe either in the princely robes sent by the emperor.

(To be continued.)

#### ON PRAYER.

Be careful what you pray for to-day. Your request may be granted at a time when you will be wise enough to wish you had not made it.

We must ask for strength from above; strength from below comes without asking.

Prayer is called one of the "consolations of religion." But religion is not intended to be a consolation. It is intended to keep us in such a condition that we shall not need consolation.

Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees. But his sides shake pleasantly when the weakest saint with bowed head is wondering if the minister means to keep on all day.

We are so selfishly anxious that God shall hear and answer our prayers to Him that we never stop to consider whether we are hearing and answering His prayers to us.—*Ethelwyn Wetherald.*