

Orientalisms of the Lesson.

Solomon's kingdom was very extensive. The Hebrew part of the population was numbered several times in the history of the nation. Presently, after escaping from Egypt, a census was taken chiefly for the purpose of raising money for the tabernacle, and nearly a year later it was taken again with the additional purpose of finding out the number of fighting men. In both instances the number was about 600,000 men. Thirty-eight years later the census showed about the same number. There was no other formal numbering of the nation till the time of David, when the total number of males above twenty years of age was 1,500,000. Solomon completed the census of David, counting foreigners and remnants of the conquered nations resident in Palestine. They numbered 153,600, and were employed in forced labor on his great architectural works. But the data gathered for the ends in view would not show the number of persons in the realm, for beyond the males enrolled, all was estimated. The oriental world has never taken a census, as we use that term. Even Great Britain had no census of this sort till within this century, the number of inhabitants being only guessed at, as the Chinese empire does still. The census for the purpose of taxation or for military necessities does not necessarily demand an enrollment of all the individuals of a country. It is a little difficult for us to realize this in the United States, where the entire count of the entire population, men, women, and children, is the basis of representation of civil and political rights, and of the destinies of the nation. It was true enough that Solomon could not count the people under his direct and indirect government; though this phrase may have been a rhetorical one.

By Way of Illustration.

Prayer for divine guidance. Cromwell, Von Moltke, Howe, and Washington, as rulers of men, submitted their difficulties to God and asked for guidance. During that terrible winter at Valley Forge, Washington was found on his knees in the forest, praying earnestly for help in those perilous times. A Quaker who overheard the prayer said to his wife, "Though I believe not in war, the cause of a man who prays like that must prevail." It is known that Lincoln said to Bishop Simpson during the dark days of the war, "This burden of responsibility is so heavy, I must have divine help. I want you to pray with me." And while the Bishop prayed, the leader of the nation and of the army knelt and responded heartily to the earnest petition.

When the sentry saw a handkerchief lying outside General Gordon's tent, he knew that Gordon was alone with God in that Soudan tent and must not be disturbed.

Imitate little children, who, as they with one hand hold fast to their father, with the other gather berries along the roadside; so you, gathering and handling the goods of this world with one hand, must with the other always hold fast to the hand of your heavenly Father.

God will guide those who trust him. When stars, first created, start forth upon their vast circuits, if they were conscious, they might despair of maintaining their orbits through coming ages. But without hands or arms, cords or bands, the solar king drives them unharnessed on their mighty rounds without a single misstep, and in perfect time. Now, if the sun, which is but a thing driven itself, can do this, shall not He who created the heavens be able to hold us?

God adds earthly riches to wisdom. This lesson is a splendid comment on the verse, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." A brave young soldier to be rewarded was told by his king to choose any gift of the realm which he might please. He thought first to ask for gold or a promise to rule, and then remembered that if he asked for the hand of the king's daughter he would inherit, not only gold and glory, but the entire kingdom. So the believer in Christ, with him, inherits all things. He has promise of the life that now is, as well as that which is to come.

A successful business man in New York said: "Every good thing in my life has come through my connection with God and his people. When a little friendless foreigner in the great city, I found Jesus in a mission Sunday school, I found immediately afterward a position, I found friends, a wife, social position, blessed companionships. Every good thing came from getting Jesus first."

A poor cobbler put God and his kingdom first and God gave him the supreme honor of establishing a Christian mission in India, so that wherever Christ is known the name of William Cary is known and honored.

God gives us better things. The Gospel mentions not riches, honors, beauty, pleasures. It passes these over in silence, which yet the Old Testament everywhere makes promise of. They were then children, and God pleased them with the promise of these toys and playthings. But in the Gospel he has shown us he has provided some better things for us—things spiritual and heavenly.

The keyword or the book of Hebrews is "better." A dozen times that word occurs. The author says that God gave good gifts to his people in the past, but under the Gospel, "how much better."

References.

FREEMAN. Ver. 15: The ark of the covenant, 142; the burnt offering, 151; the peace offering, 156.