

neighbors led to corruption of manners and gross carelessness and ignorance in their religious duties. Ezra, the scribe (458 B.C.), and Nehemiah, the governor (444 B.C.), came from the Jewish communities in Babylon and Persia as zealous agents of reform. The law was taught to the people and enforced upon all. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt, and the people were animated by renewed zeal and devotion.

Conclusion.—The long course of discipline through which Israel had passed was bearing fruit. The books of the law and of prophecy were exalted to a high place of esteem and reverence. They were read and copied by the scribes and taught to the people. Wherever Jewish communities existed, in Egypt, Palestine, Syria or Babylonia, the synagogue was established for reading the Scriptures, for study and for prayer. A great devotional literature arose, and wise counsellors instilled high moral precepts in the minds of the young. Hymns of praise and prayer were sung in the temple and the synagogues. The hopes and predictions of the prophetic age were cherished and more spiritually interpreted. While many continued to be corrupt and worldly, a real piety was fostered among the people, and they were prepared, and, in a measure, by their dispersion among the nations, were preparing the world, for a better age (Heb. 11: 40).

QUESTIONS.

1. Tell the story of the great reformation of religion in the reign of Josiah.
2. When and how did the Assyrian Empire fall? Who foretold the fall of Nineveh?
3. How long did the Babylonian Empire continue?
4. What do you know of the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel?
5. What great literary work was completed in Babylonian exile?
6. Describe the age and work of Ezra.