

(4) The view which now prevails with most scholars is that the poem sets forth the fidelity of a humble Shulamite maiden to her shepherd lover in spite of the flattering offers of King Solomon to make her one of his wives, and is intended to exalt the nobility of true affection as the basis of the marriage tie. There are no serious difficulties in explaining the terms of the dialogue on this view, and it furnishes a worthy object for the composition. There was certainly room and need for such a lesson in all Eastern countries, including Palestine.

AUTHORSHIP—The title seems to suggest Solomon as the author, but there is no good reason to suppose that this means anything more than that Solomon is represented as the principal speaker in the dialogue, which is therefore named after him. We speak of the play of Julius Cæsar without meaning that it was written by him, but only that he is the central figure. Some peculiarities in the language and the use of a few Persian and Greek words have led most modern scholars to place the composition from six to seven hundred years after Solomon's time.

LESSON XVI.

THE OFFICE OF THE JUDGE

In the Bible, as elsewhere, a judge is one who administers justice. Solomon, for example, "judged" between the two women who went to him to have a difficult case decided, 1 Kgs. 3: 28.

But in the Bible the word is sometimes applied in the larger sense of "ruler." This is particularly so in the Book of Judges. With the exception of Deborah (Judges 4: 5), these who bear this name are rather rulers of the people, than judges proper. This meaning is also found in later times. In 2 Kgs. 15: 5, Jotham is said to have "judged" the people, where the meaning must be, that he acted as regent.

The two meanings are more closely connected than we might suppose. In times of peace, one of the chief functions of the ruler would be to administer justice, or to "judge." Again, the word "judge" easily passes into the meaning "to get justice done," that is, to give one what he deserves: so that the word naturally comes to mean, in some

cases, to champion or defend a person's cause; and in other cases, to punish him. For example, in Ps. 43: 1, "judge me" really means "let justice be done me," and is practically equivalent to "defend me."

That it is in this sense that the word is used in the Book of Judges is shown by such a phrase as "the judges, who delivered" or "saved them" (ch. 2: 16); the judges are their "saviours" from the enemy. But it is shown still further and still more clearly by the stories related of the judges, in particular of Ehud, Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson. We think of these primarily as warriors.

Many interesting things are suggested by the story of the judges. For one thing, the office was not hereditary. When leaders were needed, they were sent. God's Spirit was not confined to places; He raised up men to deliver Israel at the time when and at the point where the attack was made. The "judge" is not a judge because he is his father's son, but because the Spirit of God has touched him.

Again, it is very plain that the times of the judges were fierce and rude. The religious attainments of the age were anything but high. Ehud, with his "message from God" (Judg. 3: 20), and Samson with his sensuality, brave and patriotic as these men were, and stirring as was their history, were not exactly models of holiness.

But these were the faults of the times rather than of the men; and they did not prevent the men from being instruments in the mighty hand of God. They loved their country with a love that rose to a passion, and they were prepared to face danger and death in her behalf. Sometimes, too, as in the case of Jephthah, they were men with a high, though misguided sense of honor. God took them as they were, fitted them for their work, and supported them till they had carried it through. God loves the men of single heart and consecrated purpose, and uses them to do His great work.

NOTE—Lesson XVII., being the fifth lesson for January, will be given in the **TEACHERS MONTHLY** for February, which is mailed in time for the last Sabbath in January.