

ment.—With special reference to Deut. 12 : 11-14, but also in reference to the whole law. "For a long time Israel had been without the true God, and without a teaching priest and without law." 15: 3.

Asa later on removed his grandmother Maachah from her official position as Queen-mother because of her patronage of idolatry, and bound Judah with an oath that whosoever would not seek the Lord God of Israel should be put to death, whether man or woman.' This seems hard to those who do not know what idolatry is. The present writer can never forget that he lived for a time among the heathen. But the teachers of our classes cannot know, and may well thank God that they do not know, what idolatrous worship and heathen life really are.

II. Rebuilding in Faith.—

The land had rest.—The whole era was one of movement of mighty armies and changing fortunes of nations. "In those times there was no peace to him that went out or to him that came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the countries. And nation was destroyed of nation and city of city: for God did vex them with all adversity." Shishak or Sheshouk, son of Nimrod king of Assyria, and founder of the Bubastic dynasty in Egypt, is typical of the age.

Israel and Judah, though of less importance among the nations than we are apt to think until we read contemporary history, were in the line of cross-fire between the world powers. But those were now all busy elsewhere, and Israel was still crippled by the great defeat at Yamaraim. So Judah had rest. But the same insight of faith which saw God's hand in the peace, saw that hand also in the cyclic conditions around. So he rebuilt the walls of his cities to be ready to do God's will. Faith did not say that God would defend him without walls. Faith is never fatalism, and is never foolhardy.

II. Repulse through faith.—

Zerah the Ethiopian.—In Hebrew, the Cushite. Cush as a country lay south of Egypt from Syene to the Blue and White Nile, but of the Cushites as a race many traces are found from the Tigris all the way to the upper Nile.

Dr. Jamieson, with Wilkinson, considers Zerah an Arabian Cushite, and quotes from

Bruce's Travels: "Twenty couriers on camels might procure that number of men to meet in a short time. Every one of these Cushite shepherds, carrying with them their own provision of flour and water, might have fought with Asa without eating a loaf of Zerah's bread." But Stanley, Wilson, Edersheim, and others, with more probability consider Zerah identical with Osorkon, successor of Shishak. The enormous numbers of his army have led many to cast doubt upon the text. But it is to be remembered that many of these were not professional soldiers, but camp followers; and that ancient eastern armies were not sustained in camp like those of Rome or of Modern Europe.

Mareshah.—One of the border fortresses which Rehoboam had built. It was at the converging point of many roads, and therefore the strategic point of defence against Egypt. G. A. Smith points out that it passes from history before Beit-Jibrin, later on the real capital of the Shephelah, comes into view, whereas Beit-Jibrin can be identified with no Old Testament site, and suggests that the people of Mareshah as a community moved bodily to Beit-Jibrin, two miles distant.

Valley of Zephathah—"About two miles north of Mareshah a beautiful valley debouches from the hills." Rawlinson says "This is the only occasion on which the armies of Judah ventured to meet, and with success, the forces of either Egypt or Babylon in the open field."

Asa cried unto the Lord.—A battle on the open plain was as new now to Judah as an attack upon a walled city had been when Joshua stood before Jericho. Now as then victory comes from God. "Never had there been a more distinct negation of things seen, and affirmation of things unseen which constitutes the essence of faith, nor yet a more trustful application of it, than Asa's prayer." Asa's words show real knowledge of God, and is utterly different from the forced cry of unbelief in distress. Such a prayer could not be in vain. The victory was from the Lord. "To wrest the hostile cities of the Philistines was only one consequence. Henceforth Egypt ceased to be a source of terror or of danger, and three hundred and thirty years passed before its armies were again arrayed against Judah."