

There is no hardship, no curtailment of liberty, in submitting to rule. And the teacher who consults his own happiness, the comfort of others, and the prosperity of the cause, will be as rigid a disciplinarian towards himself, as if the permanent well-being of the school depended upon himself.

FROM NEHEMIAN TO CHRIST.

A sketch of Jewish History.

The historical portion of the Sunday School lessons for 1879 closes with the second lesson for the present month, "The Keeping of the Sabbath;" and the incidents upon which the lesson is based are among the last, chronologically considered, contained in the Old Testament records. We have thought that a summary of Jewish history from that period to the coming of our Lord would be of interest to many of our readers, and we now endeavour to supply it.

Persian Rule.

Ezra, the priest, returned from the captivity in Babylon about the year 536 before Christ, Nehemiah, the tirshatha or governor, about ninety-one years later. Under the Persian monarchs, who immediately succeeded Cyrus, Judea continued feeble and depressed; exposed to insult and injury, chiefly from the Samaritans and others, who were refused permission to co-operate in the building and services of the temple.—Ezra iv: 1-6.

After the death of Nehemiah, the government of Judea was joined with the prefecture of Syria; and the Syrian governor having the high-priest's office at his disposal, it came to be bought and sold like any article of commerce. This introduced intrigue and corruption of every name, and led to scenes in which the temple itself was polluted with the blood of its highest functionary.

After the captivity the Jews retained a deep-rooted aversion to idolatry, which they justly regarded as the cause of their expulsion from their native land. Accordingly they established synagogues for divine worship, in which the law and the prophets were read, prayers offered, and religious instruction addressed to the people. All these services, however, soon degenerated into formality; tradition was placed on an equal footing with the word of God; two great parties were formed; these gradually branched out into Pharisees, Saducees, Caraites, and Essenes, besides a multitude of minor sects. Some of these, it will be observed, were in a flourishing condition in the time of our Saviour.

Alexander the Great.

Before Christ 330, the mighty empire of Persia, in fulfilment of prophecy, was subdued by Alexander the Great. This event occurred 208 years after the overthrow of Babylon by Cyrus. The Jews faithful to Darius Cadomanus, the last Persian Emperor, refused to assist Alexander in the siege of Tyre; the victorious general, therefore, soon directed his armies against Jerusalem, but was dissuaded from his purpose by a procession of the priests in their sacerdotal vestments. The conqueror having adored the name Jehovah, inscribed on the High Priest's mitre, was conducted into the temple, where they pointed out to him the prophecy of Daniel, that a Grecian King should overthrow the Persian empire. This increased Alexander's confidence of success; and secured to the Jewish nation the highest favour. About this time the Samaritans having again failed in an attempt to form a union with the Jews, built a temple on Mount Gerizim, and appointed Manassas high-priest. This increased the mutual hatred existing between them and the Jews, and gave rise to frequent hostilities.

The Kings of Egypt and Syria.

On the death of Alexander, before Christ 324, Judea had an ample share of the strife and bloodshed occasioned by the grasping ambition of his successors. It first fell into the hands of Laomedon, who was in turn set aside by Ptolemy Soter King of Egypt. Soter and his successor Philadelphus, enlarged the privileges of the Jews, ransomed those who had been taken captive, and caused the Scriptures to be translated into Greek, and deposited in the library at Alexandria. In the reign of Ptolemy Philopator they were oppressed by the Samaritans, and by Antiochus the Great, King of Syria. He was defeated by Philopator, but after the death of that monarch, he invaded and conquered Palestine, compelling the Jews to renounce their allegiance to Egypt, and put themselves under his protection. Upon the death of Antiochus, before Christ 176, his son Seleucus continued and increased the privileges of the Jews, and commanded the expenses of their sacrifices to be defrayed out of the royal treasury. This state of prosperity, however, was not of long continuance. An altercation arose between Onias the high-priest, and Simon the governor of the temple. The latter was banished for his treason, and the matter appeared to be finally settled; but Jason, the brother of the high-priest went to Antioch, bought the high-priesthood for 360 talents, and procured an order that Onias should be confined for life. Having abused his dignity for a few

years, this profligate man was supplanted by his brother Menelaus, who, if possible, was still more wicked. The result was that apostasy became general, and the services of the temple were neglected.

Before Christ 166, Antiochus carrying on a war in Egypt, a false rumour of his death spread at Jerusalem. The enraged monarch thereupon took signal vengeance on the city, abandoning it to pillage, slaying 40,000 persons, and selling as many for slaves. The temple was rifled of its treasure; and to crown his impiety, Antiochus "sacrificed a large hog on the altar of burnt offering." These measures were followed by others still more atrocious. Two years after, Jerusalem was again plundered, and filled with blood. The walls of the city were demolished and the temple dedicated to Jupiter Olympus. Idolatry was established, and those who refused compliance with its abominable rites suffered the most exquisite tortures, or were put to an ignominious death. But the time of deliverance was at hand.

The Amonean Family.

Mattathias, a priest of this family, being solicited to sanction idolatrous worship, boldly refused. He was instantly assailed, but being joined by his sons and some resolute friends, he succeeded in destroying those who would have been his murderers. The fame of the achievement soon spread. Multitudes flocked to the standard of Mattathias; and before Christ 167, he was so strongly reinforced that he attacked the Syrians and routed their hosts. His splendid career being suddenly arrested by death, he was succeeded by his son Judas Maccabeus, a worthy son of such a father. Judas led on his countrymen to further victories. With a handful of determined followers he drove the Syrian armies from the field with great slaughter, defeated their ablest generals, and destroyed the system of idolatry which the Jews had been compelled to embrace at the point of the sword. It is observed by Josephus, &c. after the death of Judas, before Christ 160, "the calamities which the nation suffered were equal to any that had been experienced since their return from Babel."

Judas was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, by whom the Syrians were again overawed, and a treaty of peace concluded, before Christ 144. The most remarkable act of this ruler was the forming of an alliance with the Romans, who subsequently became masters of Judea. The honour of the Maccabean name was next sustained by Simon the only surviving son of Mattathias. This prince renewed the treaty with the Romans, and repaired the fortresses of Judea. He was pursuing a wise and patriotic course,