

The distance between Babylon and Jerusalem in a straight line is somewhat over 500 miles. The journey took the longer time, also, because the women and children in the caravan could go but slowly, and the household goods had to be carried. They made about nine miles a day. *The hand of our God was upon us*; "the hand that defends, the hand that gives, the hand of friendship." *We came to Jerusalem*; "on the first day of the fifth month" (ch. 7 : 9), corresponding roughly with our August. Chs. 9, 10 describe Ezra's work in Jerusalem. He brought the Book of the Law into prominence, and re-enforced the ritual of the temple and the order of the priests.

Light from the East

AHAVA—A town and river of Babylonia, which have not yet been identified, but in all likelihood they were some distance from the capital on the road to the west. Probably it was the Is of Herodotus, now called Hit, about eight days' journey on the trail to-

wards Palestine. It formed a convenient halting place to review the exiles, and from which to make a final appeal to some in the surrounding country who had not come, and to make preparation for entering the desert and dangerous part of the journey.

FASTED—In a company gathered from all parts of the country, with no sense of personal responsibility or moral obligation, the great weakness would be a want of cohesion; and with men in this condition it would be dangerous to proceed with so many valuables, and through a region full of marauders. So Ezra took means to rouse their religious enthusiasm and deepen their sense of responsibility. Then the weighing of the precious vessels and the bullion, and making each of the religious leaders among them responsible for so much, increased the sense of obligation. An Oriental is ordinarily the most heedless of mortals, but when you get his conscience thoroughly roused and his honor involved, he will die in defence of his charge.

APPLICATION

I proclaimed a fast, v. 21. When the Moabites and Ammonites came up against Jehoshaphat, he proclaimed a fast. Before

Esther jeopardized her life by

Why Fast? entering unbidden into the king's presence, she and her

maidens fasted. To Daniel the revelation that the time of the captivity was ended, and to Anna the knowledge that the Messiah had come, were specially revealed after a lengthened season of fasting and prayer. Paul and Barnabas felt it expedient to fast before they ordained elders in the churches of Asia Minor. Not indeed that the mere abstinence from food has any value in itself, but the anxiety for the things of God that can abjure all luxuries of "the table and the wine cellar," and concentrate the whole soul on doing His will, is never without a response from Him. Besides, there are Christians whose flesh renders them slothful and sluggish. "I don't like your rosy faced, jowled, mobile-lipped connoisseurs of cooking and vintage," complained the good Grosart. "There is more fear of a pottengerful of gluttony than of a spoonful of superstition," said Bishop Andrews.

I was ashamed to require of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen, v. 22. Two locomotive engineers stand with their engines at

the end of a newly-built bridge.

Two Men and a Bridge

The one praises its strength and security. He points to the

skilful construction, the excellent material, the care displayed in every detail; but not a foot will he move forward on the bridge. The other man acts differently. No less minutely he examines the structure of the bridge. But once convinced that it is sound and safe, he opens the throttle valve and pushes across, trusting his life to it. It is easy to see which of the two men has real confidence in the bridge. So we trust God when we take His promise of protection, and step boldly out, though it be into a desert filled with foes. And whether we act like Ezra, who refused, or like Nehemiah (Neh. 2 : 9), who accepted, a guard of soldiers, our faith is the same. We depend not on human, but on heavenly help, for deliverance from all perils by the way.

Then I separated twelve of the chief of the priests, v. 24. There is a distinction between