

Pastor and People.

IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.*

BY HELEN FAIRHAIRS, MONTREAL.

On every side appear our eager foes,
With weary arm we strive to vanquish all,
Soon will their horrid ranks upon us close,
We flinch and stumble—save us, ere we fall!
Why standest Thou afar, O Lord?

The friends we fondly clung to, blindly loved,
Whose answering love we craved as earth craves rain,
Have either false, or coldly careless, proved,
They come not in the hour of strife and pain,
Why standest Thou afar, O Lord?

Temptation, sorrow, care, remorse and pain,
A ruthless horde with soul-devouring eyes,
Press closer still—oh, must it be in vain
To Thee we lift our pleading, anguished cries!
Why standest Thou afar, O Lord?

If Thou be for us, who against can be?
Backward those dreaded hosts would straight recoil,
At one glance of Thy matchless majesty!
Thy lightest word can all their counsels foil,
Why standest thou afar, O Lord?

ISRAEL IN THE TIME OF SOLOMON.

BY MISS J. GIBSON, OTTAWA.

The following is the first-prize essay awarded in the Intermediate department of the Higher Religious Instruction examination:—

The time of Solomon was the golden age of Israel. Of all Israel's monarchs Solomon was the most illustrious, and attained the widest sway. During his reign the commerce and trade of the nation was wonderfully enlarged, and everything was conducted on a scale of unprecedented magnificence. Scholars and philosophers are fascinated with the history of this great ruler, who mastered the whole cycle of the learning of his age, and who gained such brilliant renown for his extraordinary wisdom.

In David's reign the new monarchy became thoroughly organized and established. Numerous enemies were defeated and subdued, and the nation being now an imperial dominion, the kings of Israel were on a level with the great potentates of the ancient world. David determined to make Jerusalem the great religious centre of the kingdom, and accordingly brought thither the ark from the house of Obed Edom, where it had rested since the "breach of Uzzah." Great were the rejoicings of David and his people when they brought in the ark of the Lord and "set it in its place in the tabernacle." It was as if Jehovah Himself was passing victoriously through the gates of the henceforth "holy city," and well might the chorus swell, "Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in."

In all their wars Jehovah Himself was acknowledged to be the Divine Leader and Commander, and under His banner, with David, the "Lord's anointed" before them, the people fought bravely on, and though but poorly armed they always felt that victory was certain. David strove to have the government a theocracy, and regarded himself simply as a representative of the Divine Sovereign. After the general organization of the kingdom his first thought was to build a "house for the Lord," but this desire he was not permitted to carry out. God promised him that his son, who should be a man of peace, would build the "house." Thus, though hindered from undertaking this task, David, by his discipline and zeal, prepared the way. The hardships encompassing his whole life, his sons being such a bitter source of trouble, and his own sin, left David, at the age of seventy, an old man. Before his death, however, he assembled all the "princes of Israel" and all the mighty men together unto Jerusalem, and delivered to them his last charges. To Solomon, his son, his parting words were beautiful. He was to "be strong and of good courage," to "fear not nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, even my God, will be with thee." He was to "be strong" and "build the house of the Lord." In the presence of this great assemblage Solomon, the youthful successor to the Israelitish throne, was anointed, and "all the people rejoiced with great joy."

The kingdom which David handed over to his son, Solomon, was in a very different condition from that in which he had found it. At his accession Israel had been at its lowest ebb of national depression. At his death he left it an imperial power. Now that a permanent possession of the country was gained, Israel rose to be a nation, and at Solomon's accession the sceptre swayed from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates, and from the Orontes to the Red Sea.

The beginning of his reign was not entirely peaceful. Claiming the throne by right of primogeniture, Adonijah threatened to set Solomon aside. Gaining Joab and Abiathar to his side, they, with the other princes, his brothers, gathered together at a huge stone near En-Rogel, and feasted, saying, "God save King Adonijah." On the coronation of Solomon, which Nathan caused to take place immediately, the shouts of the people and the blowing of trumpets, welcoming Solomon as king, so effectually frightened the conspirators that they speedily dispersed. Solomon treated Adonijah and his

followers with magnanimous generosity, allowing them to go free and unpunished. Adonijah a second time conspired for the throne, and Solomon at once sent for Benaiah, the head of the body guard, and ordered Adonijah to be slain. Joab also, by direct command from the king, was put to death at the very altar of Jehovah. Shimei, a third offender, violated his promise not to go beyond the walls of Jerusalem, and was also put to death. Thus was Solomon established on the throne of David. Gathering all the representative men of the nation together, "the captains of hundreds and the captains of thousands, the governors and judges, and the chief of the fathers," Solomon went, no doubt in grand state, to Gibeon, there to sacrifice and seek God's blessing on his reign. The religious life of Israel was not at this time up to its ideal standard. It was a period of transition, there being no temple and therefore no permanent place of worship. At Gibeon, however, the tabernacle of the congregation stood, and thither went the young king with his vast assemblage of dignitaries. Here Solomon, his heart no doubt laden with the responsibility of his position, worshipped, sacrificing a thousand victims. The night was spent in the city and Solomon, with his heart and mind filled with the emotions of the past eventful day, dreamed a prophetic dream. He, the young king, succeeding so great a monarch, felt keenly his littleness, his inexperience, and the responsibility of so great a charge. "God said to him, 'Ask what I shall give thee.'" In his choice of wisdom Solomon showed wisdom. His choice was not the highest, but still it was a wise, a noble choice. "Give me an understanding heart to judge Thy people." "And the speech pleased the Lord."

A few disturbances with surrounding nations took place about this time. Hadad, an Edomite prince, hearing of the accession of the young sovereign in Israel, determined to throw off the yoke which David, as conqueror, had imposed on him. At the time when Joab was carrying on David's conquests in Edom, this young prince had escaped and taken refuge at the friendly Egyptian court. There he remained until, hearing of the death of his oppressor, he went back to his own country, and "did mischief," we are told, "all the days of Solomon." Another rebel was Rezin, who had escaped in David's battle with the Syrians. He, with a band of conspirators, established himself at Damascus, and "was an adversary to Israel." These were but minor disturbances, which Solomon soon subdued; ripples on the surface of the stream, while below flowed the broad, deep current of peace and prosperity. "Judah and Israel were as the sand which is by the sea, in multitudes, eating and drinking and making merry," dwelling in safety, "every man under his vine and under his fig-tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon." It was a critical moment now for Israel. The old isolation was impossible, for foreign trade was opened up in all directions. Would the nation resist foreign evils or yield to them? This was the supreme question.

Though there was no cause for immediate war, still it was good policy to have everything in readiness. Accordingly, Solomon first fortified the capital, building the fortress of Millo, and enlarging the wall around the city. Hazor, on the north, was built as a defence against the Syrians. Megiddo would protect the great battle-field of Palestine,—the Plain of Jezreel. The fortress of Gezer was on the extreme southern boundary. Throughout the kingdom he caused cities to be built and used as military centres. Chariots and horses were deemed indispensable and were used both for military purposes and for the king's magnificent train.

The great Gentile kingdom, cotemporary with Solomon's, was Egypt. With its king, Pharaoh, Solomon made affinity by marrying his daughter. This alliance was of great import to both nations, and no doubt proved a source of strength both to the growing kingdom of Israel and the ancient dynasty of Egypt, now on the verge of decay.

Another outlet of commerce was the land to the south-east. At the head of the Gulf of Akabah the port of Ezion-geber afforded harbourage for Solomon's navy, and from thence the fleet went on its famous voyages to the far eastern world.

Hiram, king of Tyre, had been "ever a lover of David," and he and David's successor became fast friends. On Solomon's accession he received congratulations from the ruler of Phoenicia. With friendly policy the two kingdoms united their forces and energies for the building of a navy. This was an important outcome of the alliance. Hiram sent to Solomon's navy "sea-men that had knowledge of the sea," and so they guided the ships into the unknown Oriental waters. "They came to Ophir" which was probably situated on the shores of India, and from thence brought treasures innumerable. Once in three years the vessels returned laden with gold, silver, ivory, precious stones, "hideous apes and resplendent peacocks," and from the shores of Arabia costly spices, almug, aloes, cassia and cinnamon.

The Biblical narrative mentions "the navy of Tharshish." Whether this was a separate navy from "the navy of Ophir" is a disputed point. Very probably it was, and brought silver and gold and other articles of commerce from the extreme west.

This wonderful commerce and intercourse with the foreign world must have roused the energies of the people and given them a national impulse to rise above the level of their hitherto monotonous life, and take their stand as the largest kingdom of the Oriental world.

This foreign commerce was not the only source of revenue to the nation. All subjects had to pay a fixed tribute yearly, "they brought every man his present, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and garments and armour and spices, horses

and mules, a rate year by year." Never was such prosperity seen in Israel, either before or since Solomon. Silver was "nothing accounted of" and became "as stones." The cedar of Lebanon took the place of the native sycamore in building. Everything was on a scale of luxury. Peace reigned over all the land, every man dwelling in safety, and all "passing their days in plenty and gladness."

The news of this growing and prosperous nation, with such a wonderful ruler at its head, soon spread into distant lands. "And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon from all kings of the earth which had heard of his wisdom." A remarkable instance of the extent of Solomon's influence is the story of the Queen of Sheba. Travelling over miles of desert waste, this Queen came in person "to prove him with hard questions." Her large train of camels that "bare spices and gold in abundance and precious stones," would be a sight never to be forgotten by those who witnessed it. "She communed with Solomon of all that was in her heart." With unbounded astonishment at his wisdom and surrounding splendour, she exclaimed, "the half was not told me." The Saviour Himself used this story as an illustration to His hearers. We have "a greater than Solomon" and of His wisdom and grace and glory the half has never been told.

Thus would foreign customs and practices be introduced into the Hebrew nation. Solomon, with his passion for magnificence, was not loath to follow foreign example, and slowly but perceptibly the theocratic constitution seemed to crumble away under the sway of an almost despotic ruler, whose enormous expenses could not but ruin the nation.

The court of Solomon was very large. The "great" officers of the kingdom were now called for the first time "princes." The son of Nathan the prophet was the "principal officer" and the "king's friend." The whole country was divided into twelve districts, each having at its head an officer, whose sole function it was to provide provisions for the king and his large household. Benaiah was commander of the host. Ahishar was "over the household" and held an important post. He was probably the keeper of the treasury and the armoury. Only two dignitaries retained their positions from David's reign, the "recorder" and the "tax-collector."

Costly and rich were all Solomon's buildings. With its dazzling beauty and grandeur, Solomon's own palace was prominent. It occupied thirteen years in building. Syrian architects, artists and workmen were employed, and from its colonnade, built of the costly cedar, it gained the name of the House of the Forest of Lebanon. Beside it rose the Tower of David, glittering with a thousand golden shields, five hundred of which Solomon had made, the other five hundred being those which David had carried off in his Syrian wars. In the Song of Solomon this wonderful tower or armoury is likened to the neck of a beautiful bride, glittering with rows of golden coins. In the porch or Judgment Hall was the throne—that wonderful production of artistic splendour—made of ivory, inlaid with pure gold. Here the king sat in state.

A special palace was built for Solomon's favourite queen, the Egyptian princess. All the royal banquets were on the most superb scale of magnificence, the plate and drinking vessels being of gold; "none were of silver, it was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon." No king had ever before been surrounded with so great a household, composed of a numerous train of servants, officers and courtiers, many guests, and the thousand inmates of his harem. For the first time in the history of Israel, horses and chariots were introduced into the royal and military service. These were imported from Egypt and were the outcome of the alliance with that country. In this step Solomon, as ruler over Israel, erred. Hebrew kings were forbidden to multiply horses or to have any dealings with Egypt, for the Lord had said, "Ye shall henceforth return no more that way." A hundred and four thousand chariots and twelve thousand horsemen did Solomon gather together, and the horses were quartered not only in the capital, but in towns all over the country. The stables for the horses and also for the dromedaries were on an enormous scale.

The massive grandeur of Solomon's buildings was enhanced by the setting of natural and artistic beauty by which they were surrounded. Solomon was a lover of natural history and in the Oriental style he had gardens and parks made in different localities, "with trees of all kinds of fruit, and reservoirs of water to water the trees." Stanley gives us a glowing description of the king's appearance as he drove to one of his favourite resorts. "Thither at early dawn, according to Jewish tradition, he would drive out from Jerusalem in one of his numerous chariots, drawn by horses of unparalleled swiftness and beauty, himself clothed in white, followed by a train of mounted archers, youths of magnificent stature, dressed in purple, their long black hair flowing behind them, powdered with gold-dust which glittered in the sun as they galloped along after their master."

Such was the splendour of Solomon's court that Christ spoke of it to His disciples as the highest manifestation of earthly glory, "Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

(To be continued.)

A SERVICE was held on a recent Sunday in Cambusnethan churchyard by the grave of Andrew Inglis, a covenanting martyr who, as the tombstone testifies, "was shot at Stockolton Dyke by Bloody Graham, of Claverhouse, July, 1679, for his adherence to the Word of God and Scotland's covenanted work of Reformation." Rev. R. Thomson, of Glasgow, preached to a vast concourse of people, the service being also taken part in by Revs. Alex. Harper and W. Hood Wright.