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INTERNATIONAL LESSON.

Fourth Quarter-Lesson X. — Dec. 8.

SOLOMON AND THE QUEEN OF SHEBA.—1 Kings 10:1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT.—*She came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, a greater than Solomon is here.*—Matt. 12:42.

THE FAME OF SOLOMON.—Ver. 1. The fame of Solomon's wisdom extended throughout the then known world, and from all countries came persons to hear him and to see his works. The magnificent temple Solomon had built in the name of the Lord, was the chief occasion of his fame. It was recognized that his wisdom and knowledge were the gift of God. The means by which Solomon's fame was spread abroad were his commerce, the conquests of his father David, and his alliance with Egypt and other countries.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA COMES TO SEE SOLOMON.—Vers. 1, 2. *And when the Queen of Sheba.* Sheba or Sabaa, was a wealthy region in Southern Arabia, on the south-eastern shores of the Red Sea. It was reckoned to be the richest, most highly favoured land in the ancient world, and therefore was given the name of 'The Happy.' Josephus calls this queen 'the Queen of Ethiopia and Egypt,' and the Abyssinians claim her as theirs. It is possible that her kingdom may have extended to both sides of the Red Sea, and thus included part of Africa. Whether she was a widow or a virgin is unknown. *Heard of the fame of Solomon.* Probably through the Ophir fleet, which would stop at her seaport. *She came.* Presuming that Sheba was Yemen, it would be 1500 miles distant from Jerusalem. But ancient journeys are not to be measured by miles, but by hours. Now, both the Queen and her company travelled by camels, at a walking pace. They would not travel more than 20 miles a day, which would give something like 75 days for the journey to Jerusalem, and the same for the return. *To prove (to test) him with hard questions.* With the riddles and enigmas so common in the East. *And she came... with a very great train, with camels that bare spices.* The Arabian Sheba was the great spice country. These spices were chiefly frankincense, myrrh, opobalsam, gum tragacanth, and ladanum. *And very much gold.* As a talent of gold is worth \$26,280, her present of gold would amount to over \$3,000,000. *And precious stones.* The onyx, emerald, and turquoise are still found in Arabia, and in former times the variety was much greater.

SOLOMON'S WISDOM.—Vers. 3-5. *And Solomon told her all her questions, etc., i. e., answered all her questions without any exception.* The reader may be entertained, if not instructed, in seeing what kind of problems are conceived by the Orientals to have been submitted to the sagacity of Solomon. According to their accounts, the princess sent ambassadors with a letter to Solomon before she went herself. With them she sent five hundred youths dressed like maidens, and the same number of maidens like young men, with instructions that they were to behave accordingly in the presence of Solomon. She sent also a closed casket, containing an unperforated pearl, a diamond intricately pierced, and a goblet of crystal. The letters thus referred to these things: "As a true prophet, thou wilt no doubt be able to distinguish the youths from the maidens; to divide the contents of the enclosed casket; to perforate the pearl; to thread the diamond; and to fill the goblet with water that hath not dropped from the clouds, no gushed forth from the earth." When they reached Jerusalem, Solomon told them the contents of the letter before they presented it, and made light of their mighty problems. He caused the slaves to wash themselves, and from the manner in which they applied the water, detected their sex. He directed a young and fiery horse to be ridden through the camp at the top of its speed, and on its return caused its copious perspiration to be collected in the goblet. The pearl he perforated by a stone occultly known to him. The threading of the diamond puzzled him for a moment, but at length he inserted a small worm, which wound its way through, leaving a silken thread behind it. Having done this, he dismissed the ambassadors without accepting their presents. This, and the reports her emissaries brought, determined the queen to visit Jerusalem in person. When she came, Solomon, who had heard a piece of scandal about her,—

no less than that she had cloven feet,—first of all demonstrated his sagacity by the mode in which he tested this report. He caused her to be conducted over a crystal floor, below which was real water, with a quantity of fish swimming about. Balkis, who had never seen a crystal floor, supposed there was water to be passed through, and slightly lifted her robe, enabling the king to satisfy himself that she had a very neat foot, not at all cloven. When the queen placed two wreaths before the monarch, and asked him to tell which was real and which artificial, he opened a window, and a bee alighting upon the natural wreath, told him what he wished to know. "What is that," the queen asked, "which comes like dust from the earth, whose food is dust, which is poured out like water, and which illuminates the house?" "Naptha," came the ready answer. An example of his wisdom in dealing with the difficult cases which came before him as a judge may be seen in his decision as to the ownership of the child claimed by two persons (1 Kings 2:15-28). Solomon wrote three books of the Bible. We are told that he spoke 3000 proverbs and 1000 songs. *And when the queen of Sheba had seen all Solomon's wisdom &c., the many different things which manifested his wisdom &c.*

THE EFFECT ON THE QUEEN.—Vers. 5-9. *There was no more spirit (breath) in her.* A phrase used in Hebrew to describe an overpowering emotion. *It was a true report.* She is not hindered by personal or natural pride, from frankly acknowledging Solomon's superior excellence. *Howbeit, I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it; and behold the half was not told me.* This confession of the queen of the richest and most famous country in the ancient heathen world was the greatest homage Solomon had ever yet received. *Happy are thy men.* Not because of their fine clothes, their high position, &c., but because they could always listen to his wisdom. It is a great advantage to have opportunity of frequent converse with those that are wise and good. *Blessed be the Lord thy God.* The queen understood Solomon to recognize all his wisdom and wealth as the gift of God. It is possible, as Jewish writers claim, that she was converted to the true God through Solomon's influence. *The Lord loved Israel forever: God's love is an everlasting love.* We live under its influence. *Therefore made he thee king.* This was the highest possible compliment to Solomon.

ROYAL GIFTS.—Vers. 10-13. *And she gave (see under ver. 2). The navy also of Hiram Hiram was king of Tyre, and with him Solomon had a joint commerce. Gold from Ophir.* It is perhaps impossible to identify this place with any degree of precision. The opinions of scholars may, however, be practically reduced to two. The first would place Ophir in India; the second, in Southern-Arabia. In favor of India is the three years' voyage most of the other treasures brought back by the fleet, exclusive of gold, are Indian products. If Ophir was in Arabia, then it must have been merely an emporium where the products of different countries were collected. *Almug trees.* Probably red sandal-wood. *Pillars:* probably railings or ballustrades for stairways. *Psalteries:* perhaps lyres or guitars. *Solomon gave... whatsoever she asked.* Asking for presents is common in the East, and is practised by persons of all ranks. No feeling of shame prevents either the prince or the peasant from requesting to have given him everything that he sees and covets. *Besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty.* He as the greater must give more generously than she.

Application. (1) Christ expects to receive gifts from everyone he saves. We are to give Christ our hearts, our lives, our money, our service. And we are to give freely, gladly, and not for the sake of any reward. (2) Christ always returns more than he gets. Even Solomon acknowledged that long ago (Prov. 11:25). Jesus made it sure (Luke 6:38). Our Lord gives love, and peace, and intimate companionship, joys and hopes, comforts and blessings of rich experience: he adds health and strength, thrift and success, with contentment and satisfaction. Christ gives "according to his riches in glory" (Phil. 4:19); "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20). "A cup of cold water only" he will abundantly recompense.

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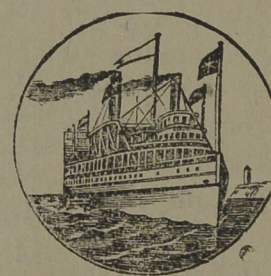
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