

THE WIVES OF SOLOMON.

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ACCORDING to the first book of Kings, Solomon's half-brother, Adonijah, after the defeat of an alleged (perhaps mythical) effort to recover the throne of which he had been defrauded, submitted himself to Solomon. He had become enamored of the virgin who had been brought to the aged King David to try to revive some vitality in him ; and he came to Bathsheba asking her to request her son the king to give him this damsel as his wife. Bathsheba proffered this "small petition" for Adonijah, but Solomon was enraged, and ironically suggested that she should ask the kingdom itself for Adonijah, whom he straightway ordered to execution. The immediate context indicates that Solomon suspected in this petition a plot against his throne. A royal father's harem was inherited by a royal son, and its possession is supposed to have involved certain rights of succession : this is the only interpretation I have ever heard of the extreme violence of Solomon. But I have never been satisfied with this explanation. Would Adonijah have requested, or Bathsheba asked as a "small" thing, a favor touching the king's tenure?

The story as told in the Book of Kings appears diplomatic, and several details suggest that in some earlier legend the strife between the half-brothers had a more romantic relation to "Abishag the Shunammite," who is described as "very fair."

Abishag is interpreted as meaning "father of error," and though that translation is of doubtful accuracy, its persistence indicates the place occupied by her in early tradition. According to *Yalkut Reubeni* the soul of Eve transmigrated into her. She caused trouble between the brothers, whose Jahvist names, Adonijah and Jedediah,—strength of Jah, and love of Jah,—seem to have been at some time related. However this may be, the fair Shunammite,

as represented in the Shulamite of the Song of Songs, fills pretty closely the outlines set forth in the famous epithalamium (Psalm xlv.) which all critics, I believe, refer to Solomon's marriage with a bride brought from some far country. I quote (with a few alterations hereafter discussed) the late Professor Newman's translation, in which it will be seen that several lines are applicable to the Shunammite, whose humble position is alluded to, separated from her "people," and her "father's house":

" My heart boils up with goodly matter.
I ponder ; and my verse concerns the King.
Let my tongue be a ready writer's pen.

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" Fairer art thou than all the sons of men.
Over thy lips delightsomeness is poured :
Therefore hath God for ever blessed thee.

" Gird at thy hip thy hero-sword, >
Thy glory and thy majesty :
And forth victorious ride majestic,
For truth and meekness, righteously ;
And let thy right-hand teach the wondrous deeds.
Beneath thy feet the peoples fall ;
For in the heart of the king's enemies
Sharp are thy arrows.

" Thy throne O God ever and always stands ;
A righteous sceptre is thy royal sceptre.
Thou lovest right and hatest evil ;
Therefore, O God, thy God hath anointed thee
With oil of joy above thy fellow-kings.
Myrrh, aloes, cassia, all thy raiment is.
From ivory palaces the viols gladden thee.
King's daughters count among thy favorites ;
And at thy right hand stands the Queen
 In Gold of Ophir.

" O daughter, hark ! behold and bend thy ear :
Forget thy people and thy father's house.
Win thou the King thy beauty to desire ;
He is thy lord ; do homage unto him.
So Tyrus's daughter and the sons of wealth
 With gifts shall court thee.

" Right glorious is the royal damsel ;
Wrought of gold is her apparel.
In brodered tissues to the King she is led :
Her maiden-friends, behind, are brought to thee.
They come with joy and gladness,
They enter the royal palace.

“ Thy fathers by their sons shall be replaced ;
 As princes o'er the land shalt thou exalt them.
 So will I publish to all times thy name ;
 So shall the nations praise thee, now and always.”

In this epithalamium the name of Jahveh does not occur, and Solomon himself is twice addressed as God (Elohim). This lack of anticipation was avenged by Jahvism when it arrived ; the Song was put among the Psalms and transmitted to British Jahvism, which has headed it : “The majesty and grace of Christ's kingdom. The duty of the Church and the benefits thereof.” Such is the chapter-heading to a song of bridesmaids,—in the original “A song of loves set to lilies” (a tune of the time).•

There are no indications in the Solomon legend, apart from some mistranslations, until the time of Ecclesiasticus (B. C. 180), that Solomon was a sensualist, or that there were any moral objections to the extent of his harem, which indeed is expanded by his historians with evident pride.

As to this, our own monogamic ideas are quite inapplicable to a period when personal affection had nothing to do with marriage, when women had no means of independent subsistence, and the size of a man's harem was the measure of his benevolence. Probably there was then no place more enviable for a woman than Solomon's seraglio.

The sin was not in the size of the seraglio but in its foreign and idolatrous wives. (Here our translators again get in an innuendo against Solomon by turning “foreign” into “strange women.”) Before a religious notion can get itself fixed as law it is apt to be enforced by an extra amount of odium. Solomon's mother had married a Hittite, and presumably he would have imbibed liberal ideas on such subjects. The round number of a thousand ladies in his harem is unhistorical, but that the chief princesses were of Gentile origin and religion is clear. The second writer in the first Book of Kings begins (xi.) with this gravamen : “Now King Solomon “loved many foreign women besides the daughter of Pharaoh,— “Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Zidonian, and Hittite women “nations concerning which Jahveh said to the children of Israel, “Ye shall not go among them, neither shall they come among you : “for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods : Solo- “mon clave to these in love.”

The wisest of men could hardly attend to rules which an unconceived Jahveh would lay down for an unborn nation centuries later. We must, however, as we are not on racial problems, con-

sent to a few anachronisms in names if we are to discover any credible traditions in the Biblical books relating to Solomon. As Mr. Flinders Petrie has discovered an instance of the word "Israel" in ancient Egypt, it may be as well to use that word tentatively for the tribe we are considering. No Israelite, then, is mentioned among Solomon's wives, and one can hardly imagine such a man finding a bride among devotees of an altar of unhewn stones piled in a tent.

As our cosmopolitan prince had to send abroad for workmen of skill, he may also have had to seek abroad for ladies accomplished enough to be his princesses. That, however, does not explain the number and variety of the countries from which the wives seem to have come. The theory of many scholars that this Prince of Peace substituted alliances by marriage for military conquests is confirmed in at least one instance. The mother of his only son, Rehoboam, was Naamah the Ammonitess (1 Kings xiv. 31), and the Septuagint preserves an addition to this verse that she was the "daughter of Ana the son of Nahash,"—a king (Hanum) with whom David had waged furious war. The reference in the epithalamium (Ps. xlv.) to "Tyros's daughter," in connexion with 1 Kings v. 12, "there was peace between Hiram and Solomon," suggests that there also marriage was the peacemaker.

The phrase in 1 Kings iii. 1, "Solomon made affinity with Pharaoh and took Pharaoh's daughter" suggests, though less clearly, that some feud may have been settled in that case also. That Solomon should have espoused as his first and pre-eminent queen the daughter of a Pharaoh is very picturesque if set beside the legend of the "Land of Bondage," but the narrative could hardly have been given without any allusion to by-gones had the story in Exodus been known. Yet the words "made affinity" may refer to a racial feud in that direction. This princess brought as her dowry the important frontier city of Gezer, and her palace appears to have been the first fine edifice erected in Jerusalem.

The commercial régime established by Solomon could hardly have been possible but for his intermarriages. Perhaps if the Christian ban had not been fixed against polygamy, and European princes had been permitted to marry in several countries, there might have been fewer wars, as well as fewer illicit connexions. The intermarriages of the large English royal family with most of the reigning houses of Europe have been for many years a security of peace, and it is not improbable that our industrial and democratic age, wherein the working man's welfare depends on peace,

may find in the undemocratic institution of royalty a certain utility in its power to be prolific in such ties of peace.

Bathsheba's function at Solomon's marriage is celebrated in the Song of Songs :

"Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold King Solomon,

With the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals."

Bathsheba, as we have seen, was said to have written Proverbs xxxi. as an admonition or reproof to her son on his betrothal with the daughter of Pharaoh. The words of David, "Send me Uriah the Hittite" (2 Sam. xi. 6), and the emphasis laid on Uriah's being a Hittite (a race with which intermarriage was prohibited, Deut. vii. 1-5) might have been meant as some legal excuse for David's conduct. He rescued Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, from unlawful wedlock, it might be said, and her exaltation in Talmudic tradition may have been meant to guard the purity of David's lineage. But the ascription to Bathsheba of especial opposition to her son's marriage with the daughter of Pharaoh indicates that the gravamen in Solomon's posthumous offence lay less in his intermarriage with foreigners than in building for them shrines of their several deities,—Istar, Chemosh, Milcom, and the rest. Against Pharaoh's daughter the Talmud manifests a special animus: she is said to have introduced to Solomon a thousand musical instruments, and taught him chants to the various idols. (*Shabbath*, 56, col. 2.)

There is a bit of Solomonic folklore according to which the Devil tempted him with a taunt that he would be but an ordinary person but for his magic ring, in which lay all his wisdom. Solomon being piqued into a denial, was challenged to remove his ring, but no sooner had he done so than the Devil seized it, and, having by its might metamorphosed the king beyond recognition, himself assumed the appearance of Solomon and for some time resided in the royal seraglio. The more familiar legend is that Solomon was cajoled into parting with his signet ring by a promise of the demon to reveal to him the secret of demonic superiority over man in power. Having transformed Solomon and transported him four hundred miles away, the demon (Asmodeus) threw the ring into the sea. Solomon, after long vagrancy, became the cook of the king of Ammon (Ano Hanun), with whose daughter, Naamah, he eloped.¹ One day in dressing a fish for dinner Naamah found in it

¹"Ammon" probably developed the name "Amina," given in the Talmud as the name of a favorite concubine of Solomon, to whom, while he was bathing, he entrusted his signet ring, and from whom the Devil, Sakhar, obtained it by appearing to her in the shape of Solomon. This is the version referred to in the Koran, chapter xxxviii. (Sale.)

the signet ring which Asmodeus had thrown into the sea, and Solomon thus recovered his palace and harem from the demon.

The connexion of this fish-and-ring legend,—known in several versions, from the Ring of Polycrates (Herodotus III.) to the heraldic legend of Glasgow,—with the Solomonic demonology, looks as if it may once have been part of a theory that the idolatrous shrines were built for the princesses while the Devil was personating their lord. In truth, however, all of these animadversions belong to a comparatively late period. Many struggles had to precede even the recognition of the idolatrous character of the shrines, and to the last the Jews were generally proud of the “graven images” in their temple,—including brazen reproductions of the terrible Golden Calf. At the same time there were no doubt some old priests and soothsayers to whom these new-fangled things were injurious and odious, and superstitious people enough to cling to their ancient unhewn altar rather than to the brilliant cherubim, just as in Catholic countries the devotees cannot be drawn from their age-blackened Madonnas and time-stained crucifixes by the most attractive works of modern art.

Although there is no evidence that the God of Israel was known under the name of either Jah or Jahveh in Solomon’s time (the Septuagint 1 Kings viii. 53, A. S. V. 12, says Solomon pointed to the sun when he dedicated the temple), there is little doubt that the rudimentary forces of Jahvism were felt in the Solomonic age. The furious prophetic denunciations of the wise and learned which echoed on through the centuries, and made the burden of St. Paul, indicate that there was from the first much superstition among the peasantry, which might easily in times of distress be fanned into fanaticism. The special denunciation of Solomon by Jahveh, and his suppression during the prophetic age, could hardly have been possible but for some extreme defiance on his part of the primitive priesthood and the soothsayers. The temple was dedicated by the king himself without the help of any priest, and the monopoly of the prophet was taken away by the establishment of an oracle in the temple. And the worst was that these things indicated a genuine liberation of the king, intellectually, from the superstitions out of which Jahvism grew. This was especially proved by his disregard of the sanctuary claimed by the murderer Joab, who had laid hold of the horns of the altar. The altar was the precinct of deity, and beyond the jurisdiction of civil or military authority; yet when the “man of blood” refused to leave the altar our royal forerunner of Erastus compelled the reluctant execu-

tioner to slay him at the altar,—even the sacred altar of unhewn stone. As no thunderbolt fell from heaven on the king for this sacrilege, the act could not fail to be a thunderbolt from earth striking the phantasmal heaven of the priest. The Judgment Day for settlement of such accounts was not yet invented, and injuries of the gods were left to the vengeance of their priests and prophets.

There is an unconscious humor in the solemn reading by English clergymen of Jahvist rebukes of Solomon, for his tolerance towards idolatry, at a time when the Queen of England and Empress of India is protecting temples and idols throughout her realm, and has just rebuilt the ancient temple of Buddha at Gâya ; while the sacred laws of Brahman, Buddhist, Parsee, Moslem, are used in English courts of justice. If any modern Josiah should insult a shrine of Vishnu, or of any Hindu deity, he would have to study his exemplar inside a British prison.