

The Queen of Sheba

J. G. Bellett.

Section 2 of: **Musings on Scripture, Volume 3**

"The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here." — Luke 11: 31.

This "elect lady" stands in a line of loved and honoured women, who, now and again, from the beginning to the end, appear in the varied and wonderful action of the Book of God. We shall find in what is said of her, not only historic information, but both moral and typical instruction. And this is common in the inspired narratives; so that the soul is edified and the mind furnished from the same page.

As to her country or kingdom, I would just observe that we read of several Shebas. One was grandson of Abraham by Keturah (Gen. 25: 1-3); another was of the family of Shem, being grandson of Eber (Gen. 10: 21-28); another was great grandson of Ham, and nephew of Seba (Gen. 10: 7). The Sheba, of which this history speaks, must have been connected with the last of these, the descendant of Ham, because the Lord speaks of the queen as being from "the south," and "from the utmost parts of the earth," while Keturah's family was sent to the east, and Shem's portion was more at home or central.

As to herself, we may presume, she had never heard the voice of a prophet, or seen the oracles of God. She had no advantages (as we speak) from education, and was a perfect stranger to the God of Israel. Her soul had, therefore, but a slender stock to trade with. She had simply, in her own land, heard of Solomon, his acts and his wisdom. This was all she had; but, with such small provisions, she was ready to take a long untried journey.

There is something admirable in this. The state of the soul itself was tested. It proved the love of wisdom to be in her heart; since a mere distant report about it so moves her. As the common saying is, "a word to the wise is sufficient." This is the admirable feature in her which the Lord notices. "A reproof enters more into a wise man, than a hundred stripes into a fool." It is the faculty within, the sense or taste of the soul, that is approved by this, and that is indeed the important thing after all. "Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom;" while, on the other hand, "a fool hath no delight in understanding" (Prov. 18: 1, 2). Here are two different sources discovered to us by the Spirit; and the first of these was that which rose in the breast of this "queen of Sheba." Her heart was right. She had a "desire" towards wisdom, and, through that desire, could separate herself from her home and her kingdom, to seek it at the distant feet of Solomon.

This is the admirable thing in her, which drew forth the notice of the Lord.

The Pharisees had asked for a sign, the sure witness of a bad state of mind. The Lord "sighed deeply in His spirit" as He heard this, we read in another evangelist (Mark 8: 12), and also with such a mind contrasted the mind that was in this "queen of Sheba"; showed her to be one that was because her heart was in it; while these Pharisees moved by a little to do a great deal, just of course were starving in a land of plenty, just of course because they had no desire. They were asking for signs in the very midst of the wonders of the hand of Christ. She took a long journey from a barren land, at the mere report of God's provisions in a distant country. With a true thirst of soul she used what she had, though it was but little. They were reproaching the Lord, as though He had given them nothing, while they were in the thick of His bounties. Here was the mighty moral distance between them. And the Lord notices it. That

which was shining on her table was but a taper (according to the Lord's figure in this passage); but the eye of her body was so single, that it gave light enough for her. Their table was bright with a number of brilliant lamps! but the eye of their body was evil, and they stumbled at noon-day, as in the night.

Here lay the difference. And on this all depends. There is no straitness in God, no lack or indistinctness in the testimony. The candle is not under the bushel, but on a candlestick, and needs nothing in size or brilliancy. Even one raised from the dead could add nothing to Moses and the Prophets. The "signs of the times" for Jesus are as clear as the ordinances of the heavens, as the morning and evening sky. But the question is, what is the state of our vision? Are we willing to do His will? Is the love of God in us, or the love of the honour of man? (John 5, 7) Is the eye single? Is the body full of light? If so, the whole region around us will be full of light also. Every saying of God, every doing of God, will be approved then: all in Jesus, and about Jesus, and from Jesus, will shine before us then. We shall justify wisdom in all her ways. The whole atmosphere which the Lord spreads will be resplendent, the path which faith takes will be lightsome; "the whole shall be full of light as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light." It was so with this honoured woman. She does not complain that her taper was small. It gave some light, and this she followed. She followed a distant report with a wishful desirous heart, and she had neither time, nor taste to complain that her journey was darksome. It was "full of light" under her "single eye."

This was the admiration of the Lord! Gracious Master! If we did but value His smile, if we did but prize our power and opportunity to refresh His spirit! This was the excellency of her spirit, by which, in the judgment, she condemns the evil-eyed Pharisee.*

*I might observe that the "men of Nineveh" exhibit a like excellent spirit, because, a few words of reproof, or of threatening, from the Prophet lead them to repentance (Jonah 3). The conscience in them was sensitive, as the desire of wisdom was in the "queen of the south." Both drew out the admiration of Christ (Luke 11: 82).

In this way our souls receive a very important lesson. We may desire for ourselves, though in a land of Goshen, and not in the utmost Sheba, that we may have like hearty value for every thing of God. This is the most excellent condition. "To love what is good is better than knowing much about it." Better to desire wisdom, than to have gathered a large store of knowledge, or of information — better to have the spiritual tastes and senses quick and vigorous, than great provision to feed them with.

We know this in human things. How many may be listening to the same music, or gazing on the same scenery, and yet how various the hidden motion that is produced. The materials have been common to all who have formed the crowd of listeners or spectators. Yes — but the effects have been infinitely various, because the faculty of delight, in each, has been various, the senses have been of a finer, or coarser mould (perhaps too, in a thousand gradations) and in that lies the reason of all this diversity in the impulse or influence produced.

And so I am sure it is in the ways of the Spirit. The Lord can give the faculty within us an improved or a finer tone. And this is excellent praise. We honour Him by this acknowledgement, that He has our spirits within His reach, and that He can sweep the chords there, or quicken the senses there. That is His glorious power. He can impart, it is true, further knowledge, and let in the brighter light of new mysteries; but is it not more blessed (may I ask) when He gives new energy to the understanding itself, or a more delicate tone to the sensibilities of the spiritual mind?

That is, indeed, I believe, the brightest dearest hour of the soul. And how constantly this may be seen; how constantly do we find that many, who know less, have more fervency! And why? Because, as I have been saying, the faculty within, the spiritual powers of the saint, have been retouched, as it

were, by the finger of God. Mary Magdalene, for instance, had but small materials. Her knowledge was not only narrow, but clouded. She ignorantly sought the sepulchre with her spices. But her heart was alive. The faculty, or sensibilities, had been awakened, and her fervent spirit expresses itself in strong, though irregular, action. There was no great entrance of light into the minds of the thousands who were joined together in the day of Pentecost. But there was a fresh visitation to the soul itself. They received the Holy Ghost. And what gladness and what singleness of heart! What victory over the world, and what conscious possession of a kingdom within, is seen in them!

Sure I am that our real power depends on the state of the faculty itself, than on the provision for its exercise, on the "eye" being "unclouded," than on the extent of the field of vision. It is *hearts* we want, and then we shall feel the captivating power of Christ. For there is plenty of that in Him, if we could but get in contact with it. But there is the mischief. The light that is in as is clouded. Many an attraction finds its way to our minds, which would not dare to show itself there, if Jesus were enthroned already, if our sight of Him had been so vivid as to leave His loved and worshipped image there continually.

It is so; and may our hearts increasingly experience it. And this lesson and these encouragements we gather from the history before us. The *moral* of a story is always the *deepest* part of it. There may be the three things, as in this story

1st. — The *event*, or historic circumstances;

2ndly. — The *type*;

3rdly. — The *moral*.

The *moral* lies the most within, and it was the glory of the mind of Christ to draw it forth.

The story is, originally, given to us in 1 Kings 10 and in 2 Chr. 9. She appears at the beginning of it in the character which the Lord, as we have seen, so beautifully and profitably noticed. She trafficked for wisdom, and the Lord's anointed king in Jerusalem was her merchant. With him, and for it, she bartered gold, and spice, and precious stones. So true a disciple of that word was she, in the spirit of her mind (though she knew nothing of it in the book of God), that "the merchandise of wisdom is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold." And the Lord will not be her debtor. He gives her far more than she had bargained for. Solomon, His servant and prophet, does more than answer her questions; he gives her such a sight of his magnificence, that she is "satisfied with fatness." "There was left no more spirit in her;" and "blessed" was she that hungered and thirsted, for she was filled. And blessed surely it ever is, when our hunger and thirst are of that fine and heavenly quality, that we can bring them into God's presence, when they are such as bear their own necessary witness with them, that none can answer them but the Lord Himself, His storehouse and fountains.

This was a sister and co-heir of Solomon. Solomon had desired wisdom, and, with it, he had inherited all things. The "queen of Sheba" had desired wisdom, and in like manner, with it, was given all things. They must have understood one another. She came from amid the dark and distant Gentiles, children of Ham; he had been reared in the city of solemnities, in the Goshen of wisdom, and knowledge, and truth; but the spirit in each was the same, and natural distances, and human diversities, are thoroughly lost in the commanding light and energy of the Spirit who knit them with one mind together.

Precious and interesting is the moral of all this simple and unvarnished tale of other days — other, it is true, as to time and place, but the same with our own in the grace and power of the same Spirit. It was the *moral* of it, which at this time chiefly attracted me. But I would just add, that in this

distinguished Gentile we have a sample, or type, of the nations by and by. For as she, in the days of Solomon, the son of David (which were the days of the typical glory), went up to Jerusalem, seeking for the wisdom that was in the anointed of the Lord, so, in the age of the real glory, the millennial age of the true Solomon, the nations will wait in the *same* city, with the *same* desire, and purpose, of heart. They will say one to the other, "come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths."