

**SOLOMON THE PRINCE, AND
SOLOMON THE PREACHER: A LECTURE
DELIVERED BEFORE THE YOUNG
MEN'S CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION, IN
EXETER HALL, FEB. 4, 1851**

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Solomon the prince, and Solomon the preacher: a lecture delivered before the Young Men's Christian Association, in Exeter Hall, Feb. 4, 1851 by James Hamilton

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JAMES HAMILTON

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Solomon the Prince, and Solomon the Preacher.

A LECTURE

BY THE

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SOLOMON THE PRINCE

AND

SOLOMON THE PREACHER.

THERE is no season of the year so exquisite as the first full burst of Summer : when east winds lose their venom, and the firmament its April fickleness ; when the trees have unreefed their foliage, and under them the turf is tender ; when, before going to sleep, the blackbird wakes the nightingale, and night itself is only a softer day ; when the dog-star has not withered a single flower, nor the mower's scythe touched one ; but all is youth and freshness, novelty and hope — as if our very earth had become a bud, of which only another Eden could be the blossom — as if, with all her green canvas spread, our island were an argosie, floating over seas of balm to some bright Sabbatic haven on the shores of Immortality.

With the Hebrew commonwealth, it was the month of June. Over all the Holy Land there rested a blissful serenity — the calm which follows when successful war is crowned with conquest — a calm which was only stirred by the proud joy of possession, and then hallowed and intensified again by the sense of Jehovah's favor. And amidst this calm the monarch was en-

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shrined, at once its source and its symbol. In the morning he held his levée in his splendid Basilica—a pillared hall as large as this.* As he sate aloft on his lion-guarded throne, he received petitions and heard appeals, and astonished his subjects by astute decisions and weighty apothegms, till every case was disposed of, and the toils of kingcraft ended. Meanwhile, his chariot was waiting in the square; and, with their shoeless hoofs, the light coursers pawed the pavement, impatient for their master; whilst, drawn up on either side, purple squadrons held the ground, and their champing chargers tossed from their flowing manes a dust of gold. And now, a stir in the crowd—the straining of necks and the jingle of horse-gear announce the acme of expectation; and, preceded by the tall panoply of the commander-in-chief, and followed by the *élite* of Jerusalem, there emerges from the palace, and there ascends the chariot, a noble form, arrayed in white and in silver, and crowned with a golden coronet, and the welkin rings, “God save the King!” for this is Solomon in all his glory. And as, through the Bethlehem gate, and adown the level causeway, the bickering chariot speeds, the vines on either side of the valley give a good smell, and it is a noble sight to look back to yon marble fane and princely mansions which rear their snowy cliffs over the capital’s new ramparts. It is a noble sight, this rural comfort and that civic opulence—for they evince the abundance of peace and the abundance of righteous-

* See I Kings viii.; Josephus’ Antiquities, Bk. viii. chaps. 5–7; and Fergusson’s “Palaces of Nineveh Restored,” (1851,) pp. 225–232.

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ness. And when, through orchards and corn-fields, the progress ends, the shouting concourse of the capital is exchanged for the delights of an elysian hermitage. After visiting his far-come favorites — the “apes and the peacocks,” — the bright birds and curious quadrupeds which share his retirement; after wandering along the terraces where, under the ripening pomegranates, roses of Sharon blossom, and watching the ponds where fishes bask amid the water-lilies, — we can imagine him retiring from the sunshine into that grotto which fed these reservoirs from its fountain sealed; or in the spacious parlor, whose fluttering lattice cooled, and whose cedar wainscot embalmed, the flowing summer, sitting down to indite a poem in which celestial love should overmaster and replace the earthly passion which supplied its imagery. Dipping his pen by turns in Heaven’s rainbow, and in the prismatic depths of his own felicity, with joy’s own ink, this Prince of Peace inscribed that Song of Songs which is Solomon’s.

It was June in Hebrew history — the top-tide of a nation’s happiness. Sitting, like an empress, between the Eastern and Western oceans, the navies of three continents poured their treasures at her feet; and, awed by her commanding name, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah brought spontaneous tributes of spice, and silver, and precious stones. To build her palaces, the shaggy brows of Lebanon had been scalped of their cedars, Ophir had bled its richest gold. At the magical voice of the Sovereign, fountains, native to distant hills, rippled down the slopes of Zion; and miraculous cities, like Palmyra,

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started up from the sandy waste. And whilst peace, and commerce, and the law's protection, made gold like brass, and silver shekels like stones of the street, Palestine was a halcyon-nest suspended betwixt the calm wave and the warm sky; Jerusalem was a royal infant, whose silken cradle soft winds rock, high up on a castle tower: all was serene magnificence and opulent security.

Just as the aloe shoots, and in one stately blossom pours forth the life which has been calmly collecting for a century, so it would appear as if nations were destined to pour forth their accumulated qualities in some characteristic man, and then they droop away. Macedonia blossomed, and Alexander was the flower of Greece; fiery and effeminate, voluptuous in his valor, and full of chivalrous relencings amidst his wild revenge. Rome shot up in a spike of glory, and revealed Augustus — so stern and so sumptuous, so vast in his conceptions, so unquailing in his projects, so fearless of the world, and so fond of the seven-hilled city, — the imperial nest-builder. Mediæval, martial Europe blossomed, and the crusader was the flower of chivalry — Richard of the lion-heart, Richard of the hammer-hand. And modern France developed in one Frenchman, the concentration of a people vain and volatile, brilliant in sentiment, and brave in battle; and having flowered the fated once, the Gallic aloe can yield no more Napoleons. So with Palestine at the time we speak of. Half way between the call of Abraham and the final capture of Jerusalem, it was the high summer of Jewish story, and Hebrew mind unfolded in this preëminent Hebrew. Full of sublime devotion, equally full of

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practical sagacity ; the extemporizer of the noblest prayer in existence ; withal, the author of the homely Proverbs ; able to mount up on Rapture's ethereal pinion to the region of the seraphim, but keenly alive to all the details of business, and shrewd in his human intercourse ; sumptuous in his tastes, and splendid in costume, and, except in so far as intellectual vastitude necessitated, a certain catholicity — the patriot intense, the Israelite indeed : like a Colossus on a mountain-top, his sunward side was the glory toward which one Millennium of his nation had all along been climbing, — his darker side, with its overlapping beams, is still the mightiest object in that nation's memory.

You have seen a blight in summer. The sky is overcast, and yet there are no clouds ; nothing but a dry and stifling obscuration — as if the mouth of some pestilent volcano had opened, or as if sulphur mingled with the sunbeams. "The beasts groan ; the cattle are oppressed." From the trees the new-set fruit and the remaining blossoms fall in an unnoticed shower, and the foliage curls and crumples. And whilst creation looks disconsolate, in the hedgerows the heavy moths begin to flutter, and ominous owlets cry from the ruin. Such a blight came over the Hebrew summer. By every calculation it should still have been noon ; but the sun no longer smiled on Israel's dial. There was a dark discomfort in the air. The people murmured. The monarch wheeled along with greater pomp than ever ; but the popular prince had soured into the despot, and the crown sat defiant on his moody brow ; and stiff were the obeisances, heartless the hosannas, which hailed him as