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Prophet Teachers of the Old Testament

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Abstract: This article gives an overview of Old Testament prophets and their works.

PROPHET TEACHERS

of the Old Testament

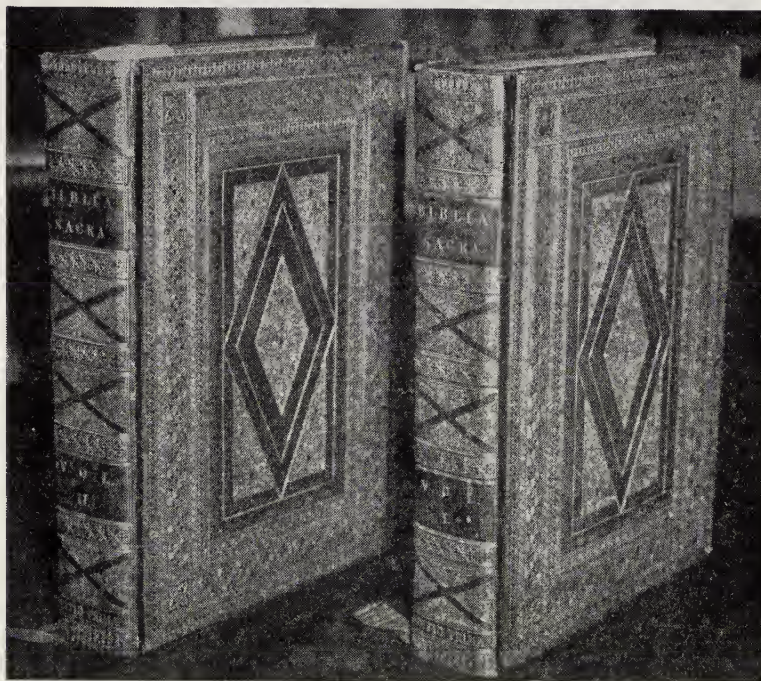
CARLYLE in his *Heroes and Hero Worship*, notes that the "calling of a prophet, the Man of God, the man, that is, who speaks to the people of God, has penetrated into the secret of the sacred mystery of the Universe. The prophet is the revealer of what we are to do."

THROUGHOUT the ages, the truths of religion have become closely identified with the thoughts and habits of mankind. Religion in the most intelligent use of the term confesses the divine relationship between man and his God. It is more than knowledge and obedience, for its home is in the deepest nature of man, where, in its allegiance to truth and its devotion to right, it governs life.

The religious principles of ancient Israel brought about the highest system of ethical life which to this day remains the most vital to human conduct. The elements of the Israelitish character idealized were the homely virtues of a rustic people: industry, frugality, chastity, uprightness; and then the hardier virtues, like bravery, and a fortitude that can endure all except defeat. Finally, the people to whom God spoke in the days of Abraham, Moses, and the ages after them learned a deep-seated piety, obedience to the declarations of the Lord their God, and their perfect trust in the revelations of him who made the world and created man. Superbly did Israel rise to the knowledge of the true and living God.

The early history of Israel shows a people with the aspiration for a righteous social order, and an ultimate unification of mankind. "Of these ideals," says Israel Zangwill, "the race of Abraham originally conceived and still conceives itself to be the divine medium for a knowledge of God. The characteristics of the people are made known to us by the very quality of the language in which the holy scriptures were written." At the dawn of their history, their thoughts were majestic and yet simple, expressed in a "language simple and rugged in its structure, dramatic in its vocabulary, and concrete in its expression of even the most spiritual things," is the comment of Dr. Wheeler Robinson of Oxford University. We keep in mind that the Hebrew race lived upon the deserts and finally moved into Palestine and Egypt. The people became agriculturists, and an old Persian proverb says: "He who sows corn, sows righteousness." Out of the deserts have come the great truths of religion and the building of temples and synagogues. Irrigation, one of the oldest in-

By PRESIDENT LEVI EDGAR YOUNG
Of the First Council of the Seventy



—Photograph by Underwood-Stratton
THE GUTENBERG BIBLE

stitutions known to man, was developed at least 4,000 years B.C. in Babylon and Chaldea.

EARLY CIVILIZATION

BABYLON was one of the greatest empires of ancient times. Its territory was located on the plains created by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The Persian Gulf lay to the south, and north of the empire was Assyria. To the west was the Arabian desert, always inhabited by nomadic tribes. The people of Babylon established a high civilization, for they had cities and beautiful gardens and roads and bridges. To put themselves beyond the reach of floods, they built their cities on artificial escarpments. They constructed their houses and temples of brick, and the remains of their irrigation canals may be seen to this day. Babylon was the original habitat of barley, wheat, millet; and of sesame, from which they made edible oil. Many kinds of vines were raised for wine and raisins. The onion and cucumber were native of that eastern land. The people at the beginning of their history had mules, horses, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and dogs; and they imported gold, silver, copper, and

fine woods, which brought about a commercial relationship with the outside world. Caravans of Babylonian merchants, passing through the Mesopotamian cities led them to the Mediterranean coast and the Nile River. They developed a phonetic system of writing, known as the cuneiform system, and from the clay soil they shaped tables on which, with steel pens, they commemorated public events and wrote down private memoranda. Dinsmore in his *English Bible As Literature* says:

In the Euphrates valley cuneiform writing was in vogue four thousand years before Christ. The baked clay tablets of Mesopotamia were an excellent medium for preserving the data and records of innumerable business transactions, laws, lists of kings, and facts accruing in their reigns. These were collected in huge libraries. The materials of history were here in abundance, yet no Babylonian composed history until the third century when Berosus, a priest, wrote the history of his native land. . . . The scribes made careful lists of the succession of rules, and codes of laws were scrupulously treasured. The same is true of Assyria.

Deeds of land were written on tablets,
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and a tablet of the earliest times shows the wages of women who were engaged in constructing a dam at the head of a large canal. At the time of Nebuchadnezzar, a large canal connected the Euphrates with the Tigris River, and the valley of Mesopotamia became one of the most fertile countries of ancient days.

The children of Israel made of Palestine "a land of wheat and the vine." When their crops failed, Israel turned to their God as the "giver of rain and sunshine and the blessed harvest," and we have the prophet Joel admonishing the people:

Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month. (Joel 2:23.)

THE Israelites had their planting and harvest songs, and like the Navajo Indians, they ascribed all the gifts of nature to a merciful and loving God. The prophet Isaiah describes the glory of redeeming the land:

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, and the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. Strengthen ye the weak hands and confirm the feeble knees.

Say to them that are of a fearful heart,

"Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you."

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Then shall the lame leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: For in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert.

And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: In the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes. (Isaiah 35:1-7.)

We can see on the frescoes in the tombs of the Pharaohs, dams enclosing basins, "just as they are built today," says Emil Ludwig, "and it can be concluded from inscriptions by what statecraft the water, after the lapse of fixed periods, was conveyed from one basin into another." We know how the shepherds dug wells and cisterns four thousand years ago and how the farmer prepared the land for the seed, and made the threshing floors. There is an aqueduct near Jerusalem with an inscription on it written by King Hezekiah about 700 B.C. Palestine has been referred to as "a dry and thirsty land," and yet the melting snows of Lebanon, Mermon, and Carmel, as well as other heights sink into the ground and come forth again as springs of water. Wells became the center of community life, supplying water for household purposes as well as for the flocks and herds. Rebekah was at the well when Abraham's servant chose her to be Isaac's wife. The wells of those ancient days played a great part in the social life of the people.

AN EXALTED CODE OF CONDUCT

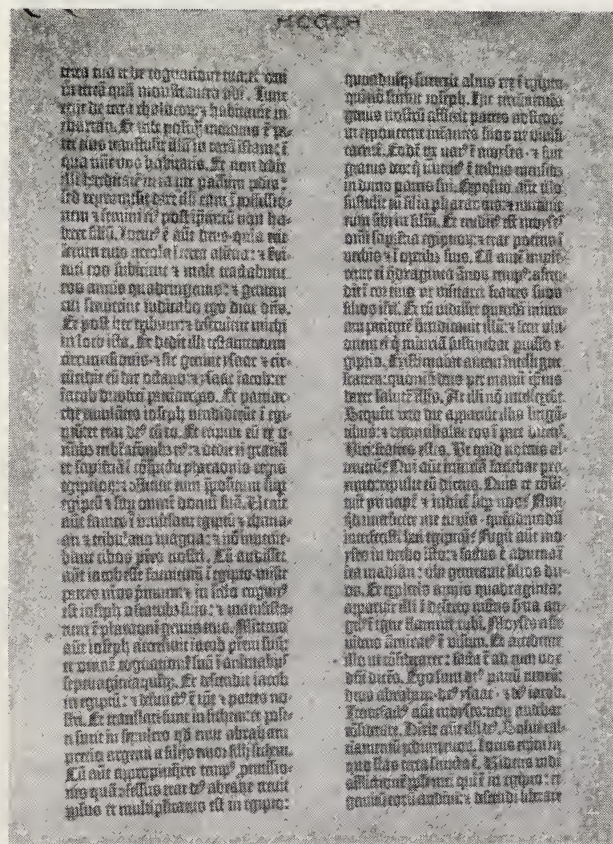
TEACHINGS of righteousness were imparted to Israel. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." The Sabbath day was set apart for the "quieting of the heart." The spiritual value of such books as Leviticus, for example, is the motive presented for right human action. Man is to be generous to the poor; is not to steal or lie. Man must not oppress the hireling, nor curse the deaf, nor cause the blind to stumble. Such things are contrary to the very nature of God. The magnificent code of action as given in Leviticus demands humaneness in the name of the Most High God. "Man must be like God; he must bring his actions into harmony with the Eternal Order." This book is a "Word of Wisdom" for the day in which it was written and though many of the old laws are obsolete, yet its superb principles of life should be binding upon us today. There is little narrative in the book, and historical events are lacking, but it gives us a priceless system of ethics, and the consecration of Aaron and his sons alone is an inspiring truth.

The religious interest of the Pentateuch culminates with the Book of Deuteronomy, which is followed by the historical books of Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel, Ruth, and I and II Kings. These books continue the history of Israel from the death of Moses to the downfall of Jerusalem and Judah in 585 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian king conquered the Holy Land in the early part of the sixth century B.C. During this period we have such characters as Samuel the prophet, Saul, David, Ruth, and the prophet Amos, who first began to write his prophecies and life. It was then that there was left to the world the real meaning of the word "prophet."

Prophets were mediators between Jehovah and his people. The sole sanction of their office was to teach through the inspiration of their God. The man whose mind is humble, whose erring heart will turn to righteousness, whose sins are followed by self-abasement and repentance, will find renewed spiritual strength.

It is generally agreed that the word "prophet" means one who announces or "fore-tells." "His message always had to do with the nation and with Jehovah, the nation's God and protector." He was the herald of national unity and religion, and in them the people placed their deepest faith. In the tenth chapter of Samuel, we infer that prophets were organized into groups or schools and were what we would term today "missionaries." They went from town to town proclaiming their message of faith in the living God. We have no information of their modes of life or means of support, but they were gathered around some leader or teacher, "and bore to Samuel the same relation as Wycliffe's preachers bore to Wycliffe himself." The Israelitish prophets

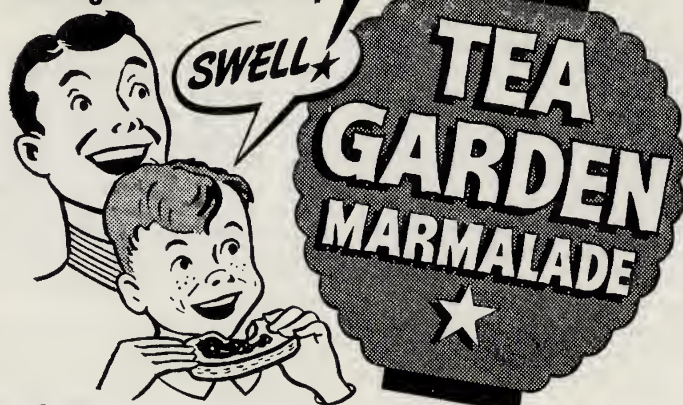
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**The Religious Attitudes
of Noted Men**

(Concluded from page 631)

tion we may reasonably anticipate a future life for man. How can a consistent evolutionist imagine that death ends all? Climbing steadily up through lower ranges of beings, Nature, with God behind it, has brought forth man, who stands before us as "the roof and crown of all things." Why, then, should it progress no further? Does the process stop just at the point where reason demands that it shall go on? Is the greatest creature in this lower world alone mocked, thwarted, and unfinished? "There is a design in creation, and the end of it is man." Gifted with the capacity to think, to will, to love, to worship, are we to believe that the end of all this is nothing? Does the mighty process of evolution end at last in a cul-de-sac? We cannot think so meanly of the mighty intelligence behind it!⁴

And Roger Babson, America's outstanding economist, feels that—

The need of the hour is not more legislation. The need of the hour is more religion. More religion is needed everywhere, from the halls of Congress at Washington, to the factories, the mines, the fields, and the forests. It is one thing to talk about plans and policies, but a plan or policy without religious motives is like a watch without a spring or a body without the breath of life . . .⁵

⁴Ibid., p. 155
⁵Ibid., p. 175

Prophet Teachers

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were characterized by their devotion to God, and went about singing and dancing, and stirring up the religious and patriotic ardor of the people.

EARLY WRITING

THE prophets Amos and Hosea were the first who committed prophecy to writing. While writing had been practised in Palestine before the fifteenth century B.C., it was in the Babylonian cuneiform, written in moist clay with a wedge-shaped stylus. The Hebrews from very early times employed an alphabet of twenty-two letters, which in time became the basis of the Greek alphabet. This alphabet was used on Phoenician tombs as early as the eleventh century B.C., on the Moabite stone in the ninth century, and on Hebrew monuments of the same time. Most scholars hold that the Phoenicians are the most likely people to have invented the alphabet, possibly by development from Babylonian or Egyptian signs. The Hebrews probably learned it through their Canaanite neighbors, with so many other elements of their culture, but at what date we do not know. An agricultural calendar was found a few years ago in Hebrew writing, dated about 900 B.C. The writing materials of the Hebrews were prepared skins of animals and papyrus. That papyrus was used in Palestine in the year 1100 B.C. may be concluded from

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the fact that 500 rolls of papyrus were brought from Egypt to Jerusalem in that year. The roll which Baruch wrote at the dictation of Jeremiah in 604 was probably a roll of papyrus, rather than leather, on which the scribe wrote with a reed pen in ink. The scribe carried an ink horn in his belt (Ezekiel 9:2), as well as a knife for trimming the reed pen. The writings were sometimes kept in earthenware vessels. Tablets of harder material were often used, such as stone (on which the decalogue was engraved) or metal, when an iron stylus was used. Ezekiel (4:1) drew a representation of Jerusalem on a clay tile or brick, and the use of potsherds or broken earthenware as account books has been made familiar to us from the excavations at Samaria, during late years.

TRANSLATIONS

THE Old Testament was written in Hebrew, but in the year 280 B.C. it was translated into Greek by seventy scholars in the City of Alexandria. The New Testament was written in Greek, and in the fourth century, the entire Bible was translated into Latin by St. Jerome. During the Middle Ages, scribes in the monasteries copied the Latin Vulgate, as it was called, on velum and parchment, and it was not until

the fifteenth century, 1448 A.D., that John Gutenberg of Mainz, Germany, printed the entire Bible with movable type. This was one of the great events of all history—the invention of printing. In the Congressional Library at Washington, D.C., is one of the first Bibles printed by Gutenberg and is a volume which we look upon with deep reverence.

To read the Holy Bible, one discovers that it is a great work of history in which the economic, political, social, and educational life of the ancient world is described by men who were students of life. Scholars hold that the Book of Isaiah is one of the masterpieces on civil government, and students are referred to the Book of Ezekiel for fine descriptions of economic life. When the monarchy under David and Solomon reached its height of power, there was a grandeur of architecture and a rich and varied industrial life in all the provinces of Palestine.

THE IDEALISM OF DAVID

David was anointed king of Judah, and later king of all Israel. He brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, and dwelt there the rest of his life. He was found by Samuel in Bethlehem in the home of his father, Jesse, and when he came to full power, his first eventful

act was to unite all the tribes of Israel with Judah. Then he went forth to conquer the Philistines and make them subject to Israel's rule. So successful were David's military operations that within one generation a strong Hebrew empire was established. Then he turned to the land of Phoenicia, not for conquest, but for commerce and trade. The Phoenicians on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea were a strong but peaceful people, and were noted for their trade and commerce. They had the largest merchant marine of ancient times, and traded with Egypt and the eastern world by way of Damascus. David had his merchants bring food supplies and fine linens from Tyre and Sidon, and from the Phoenicians he introduced many of the arts and crafts among his people. Within a few years, the Hebrew kingdom became the most renowned empire in the ancient world, for it extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Tigris-Euphrates valley on the east. He established Jerusalem as his capital, and built a castle for himself on the Hill of Zion, with workmen and materials from Phoenicia. He restored the ark of the covenant to his people, and had a tabernacle erected for its protection, although one of his greatest ambitions was to build a temple to Jehovah.

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You'd be surprised at how I keep thinking of things back home — little things like hamburger and onions, double malts and.... my car — how I miss it and wonder if you've followed through like I asked. Do you drive her down every week, and are you keeping the engine oil-plated with Conoco Nth oil? I want to hit the road just as soon as I get back and, of course, it will have to be in this one, for the new cars won't be out for some time after we finish the job which, if the censor permits, I'll bet my bottom dollar will be ~~_____~~ ~~_____~~ ~~_____~~

Bill





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THE RIGHT WAY AVOIDS DELAY!

Prophet Teachers

(Continued from page 633)

The kingdom of Israel had reached its highest glory at the time of David. At his father's death, Solomon was about twenty years old. Nathan, the prophet, had given him the name of Jedediah, "Beloved of God," but he has always been known as Solomon, perhaps after the Assyrian god of peace. His early training seems to have been left to the prophet Nathan, and the influence of his mother also played a great part in the formation of his character. He had a penetrating intellect and loved to explore all the paths of knowledge known in his day.

SOLOMON'S POWER AND GLORY

SOLOMON swayed the sceptre of a great empire "with a Puritan enthusiasm," which expressed itself, like that of David, in fervent religious lyrics. The second Psalm, which is distinctly messianic in its application, is believed to have been written by Solomon. He married into the royal families of the kingdoms around Palestine, all of which gave him greater power in his empire. He came to control the large military and commercial roads leading to Babylon and Assyria, and built towns at suitable points as centers of commerce. Solomon cultivated foreign commerce by sea, and for the first time in Israelitish history, there was a worldwide trade which added to the prosperity of his kingdom. Kings sent rich gifts to Jerusalem annually, as expressions of homage: "vessels and mules."

Not only wealth blessed the land, but peaceful days marked the lives of the people. "Every man dwelt safely under his vine and fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba." While it was the result of his government that made Solomon great, both in his own empire and in neighboring lands, he established a reputation for wisdom. Read the third chapter of I Kings, which gives his decision respecting the child claimed by two women. The magnificence of his court has been equalled only by that of the Golden Age of France during the reign of Louis XIV. Geikie, the English historian, tells us that the throne in the residence of King Solomon was a wonder of art and magnificence, made of ivory inlaid with gold. It stood at the top of six steps, on which were twelve lions—doubtless because the lion was the standard of Judah. There were palaces other than that of the king, each one of which was surrounded with great gardens, "displaying every triumph of horticultural art." Streams of clear water brought from a distance in covered aqueducts were gathered into large reservoirs for the supply of the temple and of the city.

Solomon had made for himself a couch of the wood of Lebanon. Its pillars were made of silver; its seat of gold; its cushions of Tyrean purple; and its sides were inlaid with ebony. He always appeared in public with his

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crown on and with a well-trained guard of soldiers.

TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Solomon began building the temple, which had been one of the unrealized ambitions of his father. From the king of Phoenicia he obtained skilful workmen, and a vast supply of cedar and pine trees. Large groups of men worked in the forests and in the quarries, and some 180,000 in all were employed in the erection of the temple. One writer states:

All the work was fully prepared before it was brought to Jerusalem; the stone being cut and squared, and the timber sawn and planed and shaped; so that when the work of erection was begun, it was accomplished without noise, no tool of iron being used on the spot. The silence was impressive and most appropriate to the grandeur of the Being in whose honor the work was undertaken.

The temple took seven years to build; and when it was finished the dedication festival was on a vast scale. (1 Kings 8.)

Possibly nothing in all history has ever equalled the dedicatory ceremonies that took place at that time. It is said that 22,000 oxen and no fewer than 120,000 sheep were sacrificed, and the writer of Chronicles tells us that when the king had made an end of praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices. For a description of the temple of Solomon, the reader will be impressed with the third chapter of II Chronicles.

Three times a year long trains of pilgrims from every part of the land turned to the temple to listen to the sermons and join in the sacrifices. All Israel was bound to the "Holy Place," and the words of the 27th Psalm became the instinctive utterance of every good Hebrew:

One thing I have craved from Jehovah! that do I seek after: To dwell in the house of Jehovah all the days of my life; To look with glad eyes at the beauty of Jehovah, And to refresh my soul at his temple.

Little do we realize the wonderful civilizations of ages gone by.

EZRA T. BENSON

(Continued from page 593)

Known as a "tease," his good-natured wit won quick forgiveness for his boyish pranks.

With his future well outlined, and undaunted by the necessity of remaining at home to help his father run the farm, young "T" took a correspondence course in farming. Because his father was "in tune" with modern progress, he was encouraged to put into practical use all the "book learning" he could absorb.

The much desired call to the mission field came while President Benson was attending the Utah State Agricultural College, and he served in Great Britain from 1921 to 1923. Crystallizing his religious background, it brought into active play his spiritual qualities. His ability in leadership developed also and he was chosen to serve as president of the Newcastle Conference.

Following his release he took up the pursuit of his education. But he never lost sight of his church work. He served on the stake Sunday School board, the stake board of the M.I.A. and in the stake superintendency progressively.

THOUGH his present-day firm convictions on cooperative movements had not formed into words, while still a youth, Ezra T. Benson entered into his first cooperative enterprise. After much planning and heart-to-heart talks with his father, he and his brother, Orval, purchased the farm. "Cooperating" in both farming and education they alternated quarters at the Brigham Young University in Provo, from which President Benson graduated in 1926.

In the Salt Lake Temple, on September 10, 1926, Ezra T. Benson married Flora Smith Amussen, youngest daughter

of Carl Christian Amussen, prominent Salt Lake jeweler and business man. A scholarship took them to the Iowa State Agricultural College where President Benson won a Master's Degree in Science and was elected to Gamma Sigma Delta, the honor society of agriculture.

Though Ezra T. Benson loved the simple life of a farm and the soul-satisfying activities of church work in his little community, his services were required in larger fields. Asked to serve as county agricultural agent, he moved to Preston, Idaho, in 1928. Still interested in young people, he became identified with 4-H Club work. Under his guidance the enrollment increased from less than a hundred members to over five hundred.

In 1930, President Benson became extension economist and marketing specialist of the University of Idaho, College of Agriculture. After a leave of absence from his duties to do more post-graduate work at the University of California, he helped to organize the Idaho Cooperative Council and served as its secretary. His work carried him to all parts of the state and annually to Washington to attend conferences with agricultural and cooperative leaders.

Still active in church work, Ezra T. Benson became a member of the Boise Stake M.I.A. board and later superintendent. After serving as first counselor in the Boise stake presidency he became president of the stake and served in that capacity until 1939. When he received the attractive offer of executive secretary of the national council, he would not consider it until the first presidency of the church recommended his acceptance and released him from his position.

(Concluded on page 638)

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