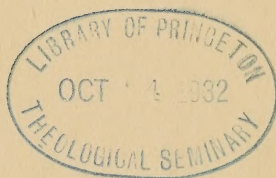


LOVE TRAILS
of the
LONG AGO
JAMES I. VANCE

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OF THE LONG AGO*

By James I. Vance, D.D.

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LOVE TRAILS OF THE LONG AGO

By

JAMES I. VANCE, D. D., LL. D.

Author of "God's Open," "Forbid Him Not,"
"In the Breaking of the Bread," etc.



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*To the Lady who met me on The Trail,
And stayed to share every step of the way.*

PREFACE

N this day when love is libeled as purely mechanistic, caricatured in the "best sellers," shamed in the divorce courts, counterfeited at the marriage altar, and mimicked in the movies, it may bring back to hearts who have lost faith a bit of the fragrance of a day that is gone, to wander down old paths worn by the feet of some of the lovers of the long ago.

It would be a dull world if romance faded from life, and if the bond which makes of man and woman husband and wife became aught less than love.

The love of one man for one woman is the bit of radiance that still shines down the years from the lost Eden. Concubinage came later. Polygamy, divorce, "companionate" marriage, are all the stained and lustreless counterfeits which lust would substitute for love.

Happy are the hearts who mate under the spell of a stainless love, and thrice blessed those who remain lovers to the end.

With the wish that these old stories may

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crown the marriage dawn with hope and gild its sunset hours with fond memories, I am asking my readers to walk down these lovers' lanes of the far past. It will be enough if at the end of the chapter the eye that reads shall glow with a tender light, the hand that turns the pages lay a flower to the memory of her whom he loved best.

J. I. V.

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Nashville, Tennessee.*

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I

EVE

The World's First Love Story

"The woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat."—GENESIS 3:13.



COMES the first romance of the race. It takes us back to the earliest love story in human history. There in the Garden of Eden this old, old story of comedy and tragedy, of smiles and tears, of rapture and anguish began. It was a perfect start. There was never a cloud in the sky, never a curse on the earth, never a sin in the heart. Nature was a world without thorns, and life was existence without pain. As yet, jealousy and suspicion were unhatched, and hate had not dared to blacken with its breath the purity and sanctity of the bond which makes of man and woman husband and wife.

But all too soon the clouds began to gather, and quickly the storm broke. Sin dragged its slimy trail through Paradise. Disobedience opened the door to all the demons that

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plague our happiness. Fear and discontent mated and bred despair, and soon Eden was but a memory, and Paradise a dream.

Thus the first love story of the Bible casts a shadow. It is a story of temptation. We wonder what the world would have been if the shadow had not come, if Satan's temptation had been resisted and God's command obeyed. We wonder why God permitted the fall. Why did He wait to station His angels with the flaming sword? Why was not an angel by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to bar the way? It is profitless to speculate. We must take the world as we find it, and it is a world into which sin has entered.

LIFE STARTS WITH A TRAGEDY

Human history begins in a tragedy. It is not important for our discussion to fasten on any particular view or interpretation of the opening chapters of Genesis. Some say the account there is poetry, and class it with the epics of Dante and Milton. If they are right, and the story of Eden is a poem, the great facts there presented are not less facts. Some say it is an allegory and class it with

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Pilgrim's Progress. If they are right, and the story of Eden is an allegory, the truths revealed are not for that reason discredited. Some say it is a myth, like the story of Jupiter and Venus. If they are right, and the story of Eden is mythology, the relations of life there defined are not mythical, for they exist in every home. Some say it is history,—that Adam and Eve were real persons. If so, the value of the old story is not that it has to do with our first parents, but that as we read it, we feel that whoever wrote it was writing about us. It is realistic. It is packed with human interest, and throbs with life. Whether, therefore, it be poetry, allegory, mythology, or history, the lessons it throws on the screen as the curtain rises are the same.

Human life opens with a love scene. Man is given a helpmeet. Man and woman were made for each other. This fact was built by the hand of God into their natures. Neither can get away from it. Occasional freaks both on the masculine and feminine side may appear which seem to challenge the sex law, but these exceptions only prove the rule. "It is not good for man to be alone." It is no better for woman.

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The union is a consecrated one. Back in the dawn of the race, it was the sanctity of religion that hallowed Eden's marriage altar, and said: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife, and they shall be one flesh." People who despise the religious sanction when they come to plight their troth invite distrust and solicit disaster.

Man is given a helpmeet. The union is consecrated, and Eden is the result. The happiness of Eden consisted in more than scenery, than blooming flowers and ripe fruit hanging low and the music of silver waters murmuring over golden sands. It was essentially the happiness of a life harmony built on love.

Thus every Eden from then till now has started. It is wonderful how happy people can be when perfectly mated. One of the strong arguments for the reality of eternal happiness is in the ecstasy thus experienced. If here Heaven is so near, somewhere and sometime Heaven will not be far at all. What a pity that this Edenic happiness should not be permanent! What a pity that Paradise must pass, that the dream must be

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shattered, and the happiness of home become but a memory! What a tragedy that the skies should be overcast with clouds, and the day turn gray, and the love story of the first earthly Eden cast a shadow on life!

EDEN WRECKED

Eden was wrecked by sin. It is always wrecked this way when it is wrecked. The flowers in the garden may keep on blooming. The fruit may ripen and the river sing its song. But if sin is in the heart, happiness is dead.

Was sin necessary? Sometimes we argue as if it were. We see how through struggle and endurance character is wrought out. We watch the mettle of the soul develop under pain and trial, and sometimes we are half persuaded to say that evil is necessary. But it is not necessary now. It is not necessary to do wrong to be great, to sin to get character. That would libel God and challenge Calvary. If sin is not necessary now, it never was necessary. Evil is an outlaw in God's world, and wherever it shows its face, it is hostile to all that is holy in the sight of God and precious in the sight of man.

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You have seen homes wrecked by sin. You have seen the old serpent drag his foul trail of lust and infidelity across the sanctity of the marriage vow. You have seen a man or a woman yield to temptation, and then you have watched the gates of happiness close against them, and the flaming sword of a righteous retribution bar their way back to Eden. You have seen them eat forbidden fruit until the curse has rested on them and theirs.

If people would only obey God! He is the home's best Friend. If only they would honour Him Eden would never fall into ruins.

A WOMAN'S SIN

Eden was wrecked by a woman's sin. "Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression." It was not a man, but a woman, who first yielded to temptation. We may interpret this as we please, but the facts stand. It was the helpmeet God gave man who placed the forbidden fruit to his lips. The kind of woman a man marries has much to do with the man he becomes and the life he lives. A

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man marries a frivolous and shallow woman and surrenders to her cheap views of life. Another man of no stronger character marries a woman of conviction and lofty religious ideals, and she lifts him by the compelling power of association. Of course the man also influences the woman, but to a less degree.

I think there were mitigating circumstances when the woman sinned. Where was Adam while Satan was doing his dirty work? Why was his wife left to face the adversary alone? John Jasper, the famous negro preacher of Richmond, Virginia, had a sermon on this subject, in which he represented Satan as an attractive gentleman who called on Eve, and she, being lonely, was persuaded. She was the first lady of the land, and was lonely.

She was also inexperienced. Many a temptation would have been resisted if we had only known. The voice of the tempter says there is no danger. Certainly not for this once. You will not surely die. His words are plausible, his speech is fair, and reluctance is overcome.

It was to Eve's credit that the fruit was

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from the tree of knowledge. If Satan had gone after Adam he probably would have tempted him with cheaper fruit. He could have done his work with fruit from the tree of pleasure, or the tree of lust, or the tree of greed. It was a woman, however, who was in the transgression, and Eden was wrecked by a woman's sin.

I am not saying that the man was not to blame. It is called, after all, Adam's transgression. The woman was deceived. Adam did not have even that much to his credit. He ate with open eyes. It was not a case of chivalry, for his chivalry goes to smash under God's cross-examination. He said: "The woman thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." Then Eve adopts a similar rôle. "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." The man lays it on the woman, and the woman on the snake, and God on all three.

No mitigating circumstances, however, can ever hallow or condone a surrender to temptation. Eve fell because she despised God's word. Christ conquered because He honoured God's word. The two temptations were practically the same. In each case,

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three appeals were made by Satan,—to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. Eve yielded to all three. She saw that the fruit was good for food, pleasant to the eyes, and desired to make one wise. Christ resisted all three. He was tempted to make stones into bread, to choose the kingdoms of the world, and to prove His power over life by casting Himself headlong from the height. He replied: "Get thee behind me, Satan, for it is written." Satan still campaigns in the old way, and he who meets him with the sword of the spirit will never lose Paradise.

THE BEST MADE WORST

The tragedy of the lost Eden is not simply that sin entered, but that God's choicest and holiest gift to man was the occasion of his fall. Creation was on an ascending scale. God crowned His work not when He made man, but when He made man's helpmeet. The tragedy was that this helpmeet became the temptress.

A woman's influence is about the holiest thing on earth. Think of a mother's love, a wife's devotion, a daughter's affection, a sis-

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ter's concern. Women were Christ's most devoted friends, last at the cross and first at the tomb. See them as they slip through the gray light of dawn to embalm His body. It is the presence of woman that makes the happiness of home.

"She doeth little kindnesses
Which others leave undone or despise,
For naught that sets our hearts at ease
Or gives us happiness and peace
Is low-esteemed in her eyes."

Yet holy as is woman's influence, it may degenerate and become devilish. A good woman is best. A bad woman is worst. From the beast up, when the beast instinct is uppermost it is ever true that "the female of the species is more deadly than the male." Wine and woman go together in the catalogue of temptation.

Thus Eden passed. They were driven out. A sword guarded the gate, and the curse came down. So closed the first chapter in human history. They wandered from the garden into a wilderness of thorns where existence was a struggle and every joy was shot through with pain. You can see them wandering down the years, along the thorn-

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path under the curse. It is the story of the race of which you and I are a part.

THE SHINING PROMISE

But while it is a love story that casts a shadow, it is a love story with a promise, and the promise shines against the dark background of the curse. The very conditions under which they began their exile reveal the fact that God had not cast them off. Angels guarded the gate of Eden to keep them from eating of the tree of life lest the fall be made permanent and their doom become hopeless. They were sentenced to work, but we have long since discovered that work is a blessing, the secret of happiness. Thus in obeying the curse Eden began to rebuild.

There was also a promise. "She shall be saved in child-bearing." There motherhood shows its sweet and holy face, and woman's mission begins outside the shut gates of the lost Eden. Her new Paradise is to be found ✓ in a baby's face. Woman is to realize her greatest happiness in her children. Woe betide her should she ever dishonour motherhood. With a child in her arm, and God's

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promise in her heart, she begins to see that Eden is not behind, but ahead.

There is also a prediction. "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." With that another shadow falls, not of sin, but of its cure. It is the shadow of a cross, with a glorious sun shining above it, the sun of righteousness. Sin's conqueror is coming. "They shall call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." From the cross He lifts a nail-scarred hand and opens heaven's door as He says to the penitent thief: "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." And so Paradise is not lost. It is eternal. It is yonder just beyond Calvary's cross. The homes sin seems to wreck rebuild, and are eternal in the heavens. The garden is gone, but the holy city is coming down from God, and it dawns fair on the skyline of faith.

II

ZIPPORAH

The Woman Who Married the Wrong Man

"He gave Moses Zipporah, his daughter."

—EXODUS 2: 21.

HE world's first love story took us to a garden. The second takes us to a desert. The groom was an Israelite. The bride was a Midianite. And the officiating minister, probably the bride's father, was half pagan. It was not a happy marriage.

THE BRIDEGROOM

Look first at the bridegroom. Measured by any standard, Moses was one of the great men of the world. If one were asked to name a dozen men who have wielded the largest influence in human history, he would have to include this Jew in the list. An old line Whig has characterized Moses as "the Henry Clay of his time." He is the world's lawgiver. The Mosaic code is the foundation of all ethical relation between individuals and nations.

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His early manhood was brilliant and full of promise. Brought up in the palace of the Pharaohs, the mightiest rulers of that day, educated in the great university of Egypt, regarded as the heir to the throne, Moses had all that birth and wealth and power, that learning and position could bestow. In his day he was the first citizen of the world in opportunity and position.

His native ability matched these outward advantages. He was a man of tremendous force of character. No weakling could have faced the crisis and won the victory he won the day he walked out of Pharaoh's palace, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. He must have possessed superb gifts of leadership. It was a difficult task to take that mob of slaves and train them into a people with laws and courts, with restraints and ideals and aspirations, and a spirit of nationalism that is to this day unconquered. His interviews with Pharaoh during the plague controversy discover him to have been a statesman and diplomat of rare ability.

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These and other features of greatness which must be painted into the portrait reveal Moses as one of the big men of the world, big of brain and will, of character and influence, of initiative and leadership. He was an outstanding man for that or any age, and would rank with a score of world leaders gathered from all the years, of whom it might be said:

“They are a glorious company,
The flower of men to prove
A model for the mighty world
And be the fair beginning of a time.”

And now the time has come for this great personality to be matched with a helpmeet, for this man who is to create a nation and shape human history to select a woman to share his life. Moses is to marry. Where can be found a bride fit for such a union? Where among the great souls of the world a woman who can mate with this man in such a way as to make his greatness greater and his mission more sublime? Where is Moses to find a wife who will prove an inspiration and comfort, who will cheer him in hours of discouragement, inspire him in the presence

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of duty, who will sustain him in defeat and counsel him in success?

THE COURTSHIP

The courtship was incautious. It was hurried. Recall the meeting at the well. Moses has fled from Egypt. He is lonely and depressed. He has reached the land of Midian and must be somewhat moody, for he finds nothing there for a man with his gifts to do. Suddenly the door opens to knight errantry. Seven young women come to water their flock, but the rough shepherds of the desert drive them away that they may have the first turn at the well. Moses interposes. He must have been something of an athlete, for when he has finished, the ladies have the right of way to the well. It was a deed of chivalry. The girls went home and told their father about it. He was pleased. Moses is invited in, and before there is much time for him to take his bearing, he finds himself married to one of the seven. "And he gave Moses Zipporah his daughter."

There was too much haste. Many a marriage has been spoiled by speed. People who wed in haste may repent at leisure. Take

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your time. Sometimes the preacher is blamed, but he is powerless to put on the brakes. The place to dam up this stream of matrimonial impetuosity is where the marriage license is issued. It is a good law that requires some weeks to intervene between the declaration of an intention to marry, and the nuptial hour.

It was a desert courtship. Zipporah knew nothing of the kind of life to which Moses had been accustomed. She was a provincial. Moses was a cosmopolitan. He was a man of the world. She was a girl from the country. He was a university graduate, and she was an unsophisticated shepherdess whose world ended with her father's flock. I am not saying that love cannot bridge such a chasm with happiness, but the crossing is risky. They had little in common. You have seen such marriages. How often without much fault on either side their Eden falls into ruins!

The marriage seems to have been largely the result of propinquity. Marriageable men were scarce in the desert. Still scarcer were men of chivalry, men who would stand aside for the ladies at the well. And so

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Moses as a suitor was irresistible. Then on his side, Moses was lonely. He was far from his people. He was in a mood to invite sympathy, and was thrown daily into the young woman's society. Soon matters were arranged, and largely because of being thrown together, they got married.

Genius is of small value when it comes to choosing a wife. In the affairs of the heart, "A man's a man for a' that." From the standpoint of intellect and statesmanship, Moses was a world leader, but in courtship he was an ordinary mortal. So he did as any man would have done under similar circumstances. He became a benedict.

THE BRIDE

Look next at the bride. She was one of seven daughters, which should have been something in her favour. It should have saved her from selfishness, and taught her how to get along with other people. If in the face of this she degenerates into a common scold, beware! She seems to have been industrious. She knew how to work. She could take care of sheep. While this trait is not to be despised, it is not the only qualifica-

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tion necessary for the making of a happy home.

Her name is suggestive. Zipporah means a bird, a sparrow. If the name was indicative of her personality, Zipporah was not comfortable to live with. She was like a sparrow, chattering, tiresome, exasperating, insolent. Perhaps she nagged. There is nothing much worse for a woman to do. Many a man has been driven to drink by a nagging wife. One can stand almost anything but this mosquito trait, this eternal and unceasing domestic minor chord. It is worse than a swarm of gnats, more fearsome than a buzzing wasp. Don't nag. If occasionally you must explode, explode and be done with it. Let the lightnings flash and the thunders roar, and then let the sun go on shining.

She was a Midianite, and probably had the distinctive traits of her people. Their standards of life were hers. From the Old Testament we get a fair idea of the Midianites. They were nomads, restless, never satisfied anywhere very long at a time. They exerted an evil influence over Israel. The ideals of the two nations were antagonistic. They were a nation of plunderers, and the

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spoils captured from them by the Israelites in war consisted of jewelry and gold and silver and rich garments. They were a people who loved jewelry and delighted in finery.

Read all these national traits into Moses' wife, and you have a vain and frivolous woman, who loved dress and found her happiness in things that appealed to the senses. She was a woman of low ideals, not over-scrupulous as to how things were secured, provided only she got what she wanted. She was a woman easily wearied by monotony, with few resources in herself, and who judged the world by her own narrow experience. If this picture resembles Zipporah, is it strange that such a love story should cast a shadow, that such a marriage should miss happiness?

MISMATED

Moses and Zipporah were mismated. It was the case of a woman who married the wrong man. Zipporah should have married one of those bold herdsmen who so cavalierly made the women stand aside from the well. She should have mated with a cave-man. She could have understood him, and he could

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probably have handled her. But Moses belonged to another world, and soon the shadow falls across their union.

Moses is not happy. The very names he gives his two sons are significant,—Gershom, “I am an alien,” and Eleazer, “God is my deliverer.” The man’s heart is crying out for his own people, and for the faith of his fathers. Across the names of these two sons we look into the face of a man who is yearning for his life-work. It is not here in the desert. It is yonder with enslaved Israel. God has called him to set his people free. That is his task, but nobody here in the desert understands. When he talks to Zipporah, the heavens are brass. What does she know of Israel? What does she care?

At last he can stand it no longer, and they start to Egypt. I fancy there was some domestic unrest before the start was made. It required argument, and argument easily degenerates into wrangling when a woman is to be convinced against her will. But at last they are off. Jethro says: “Go in peace,” and there they go,—Zipporah and her two sons on horseback, and the man who is to break the yoke of Egypt and give the world

its code of ethics afoot. A great man is not always a hero in his own home. He does not always deserve to be. Moses must have been somewhat to blame. He lived with his head in the clouds. Zipporah was exasperated because he did not devote more attention to her and the boys. She was tired of this ceaseless discussion of Egypt. His greatness did not impress her. She cared nothing about it. It is not bad for a man to have at least one honest critic. Most men have the want supplied when they marry. But criticism, to be helpful, must not be caustic. The trouble with Zipporah was, she was all vinegar.

That she cared little for her husband comes out on the journey to Egypt. Moses nearly lost his life. "It came to pass by the way in the inn that the Lord met him and sought to kill him." That is the way one who believes in special providence would describe it. Just what happened we do not know, but Moses' life was in dire peril. There is not a syllable to show that his wife was alarmed, or even disturbed. Her silence is eloquent of her unconcern. It does not say that she was disappointed at his not being killed, but there is no ecstasy over his deliv-

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erance. Evidently she did not love her husband, and a woman who is married to a man she does not love is in a poor way to make a happy home.

It is evident that she despised his religion. He may have been too pious for her. Some men are too good to be livable. They have no redeeming vices. Zipporah was married to a man whose life-work was religion, and she was out of sympathy with his work. This appears after Moses escaped from death, in connection with the rite of circumcision. It was sacred to Moses. It was hateful to Zipporah. There was a controversy. She hurls her disdain into his teeth, as she says: "Thou art a bloody husband unto me." She repudiates her husband's faith. A woman who marries a preacher without loving his work, marries the wrong man. The union is a trial to her, but a calamity to her husband.

Finally they separate. It took place in Egypt. That they separated appears from the fact that Zipporah and the boys are back in Midian with Jethro, while Moses is fighting on in Egypt to set his people free. You can imagine the story she told her father when she returned. "Moses is crazy. He

cares nothing for his family. He spends all his time on absurd schemes. The country is in a dreadful condition. The people are suffering from plagues. It is no place for decent people to live. Thank God we are back in the desert!" And so she left her husband to fight it out alone. She failed him when he needed her most. She left him because she cared nothing for him, and hated his work, because she was not great enough for sacrifice and heroism, because her shallow nature could not appreciate the faith and fortitude of a big soul. I do not know how much her father believed of her story, but she was his daughter. Probably both concluded that Zipporah had made a poor match, and neither expected anything more of Moses.

But one day news came. It came rushing through the desert, and every wireless line of communication was alive with the news. Moses has won. He has conquered Pharaoh. He has set Israel free. He has crossed the Red Sea on dry land. He is at the head of a victorious nation, and is marching on Midian. There was excitement in Jethro's household the day the news came. His son-

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in-law is a bigger man than they thought. It is advisable to keep him in the family. Soon they are on their way to meet him. Something is said in the record of Moses' reception of Jethro, but not a syllable as to how he received his wife. The woman who deserted her husband when he needed her has come back to him because he has succeeded, because he has become a powerful sheik, because he can provide what a Midianite loves. But the curtain falls on Zipporah when she enters her husband's tent, and we hear no more of her. Neither do we hear anything of her sons. The atmosphere of such home life is not productive of greatness.

PRESENT DAY PARALLELS

Unfortunately this old story repeats itself, and seems to do so increasingly in modern life. Women still marry the wrong man. The present day picture shows and novels proceed on the theory that people are to love each other until they get married, and then the man is to get interested in another man's wife, and the woman in another woman's husband.

It is better not to marry at all than to

marry wrong. Marriage is honourable, but there is something less desirable than single blessedness. No woman should marry unless she marries well, and she marries well, not when she marries money or position, but when she marries the man she loves, and whose lot, cost what it may, she gladly and lovingly shares.

For a union to be happy, it must be consecrated. Why should marriages not be made in heaven? If we approach other things in prayer, why not the most momentous issue of life? If God can help us anywhere, surely if we will but seek Him, He will help us when we come to take our part in the oldest task of time,—in the making of a family, the building of a home!

III

VASHTI

A New Woman in an Old World

"But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by his chamberlains; therefore was the king very wroth, and his anger burned in him."

—ESTHER 1: 12.

HE world's first love story took us to a garden, the second to a desert. The third takes us to a palace, to Shushan, the royal seat of a world ruler. It was called Shushan from the abundance of lilies in the vicinity. Archæologists think they have discovered the ruins of this castled palace of the lilies in a richly watered valley whose mounds and four spacious artificial platforms of remains lift themselves at the highest point to a level of a hundred and nineteen feet above the plain, and mutely testify to the barbaric splendours of a vanished age.

The Ahasuerus of this story is identified by many careful students of Bible history

with the great Persian monarch Xerxes, who led an army of a million men against Greece, but who returned from that disastrous campaign ingloriously defeated. Three kings are mentioned in the Old Testament by the name of Ahasuerus. The word means "king," and was probably a title for Medo-Persian monarchs, as "Pharaoh" was for the rulers of Egypt. The feast referred to was in the third year of the reign of Ahasuerus, and in the third year of Xerxes' reign, Herodotus says there was an assembly of his lords and nobles to arrange for the Grecian war. In the seventh year of his reign, Xerxes returned in defeat from the Grecian campaign, to console himself with the delights of his harem, and in the seventh year of the reign of Ahasuerus, "fair young virgins were sought" from all the realm, and Vashti was replaced by Esther.

For these and other reasons that cannot be considered here, the royal libertine whose excesses are recounted in the opening chapter of the Book of Esther may be regarded as none other than the man who has come down in secular history under the name of Xerxes, and who in his war with Greece

found that the Spartan courage of a little land of virtuous people more than matched a world empire built on luxury and lust.

THE REVEL

Consider first the revel. It is a picture of Oriental splendour and extravagance. Here is a monarch who reigns over one hundred and twenty provinces, stretching from India to Ethiopia. During the world war it became again a war zone in what had become a land of memories. It was a wealth zone when this love story made its trail, where dwelt perhaps the richest and most prosperous nation on earth. The young king had been on the throne but three years. His revenues must have been immense. His name was a synonym of power. He no doubt felt his importance.

He determines to gratify his lordly mood in the usual Oriental way by holding a great feast to which all the big men of his kingdom shall come, and where they shall be dazzled with the splendour and magnificence of his gorgeous court. And they come, the power of Media and Persia, the nobles and princes of his provinces.

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The feast lasted one hundred and eighty days. He showed them the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty. We may imagine what went on during those six months,—what bouts of dissipation, what unbridled excesses, what shameless debauches. It was a carnival of licentiousness. It was a riot of lust. Every scene and scheme was resorted to to tickle the jaded senses and to give to the beast side of human nature a new thrill.

The six months' riot was climaxed with seven days in which the doors were open, not only to the men of place and power, but to all the people in Shushan, both great and small. Then began an orgy of sensuality that paled the excesses which had gone before. Marble columns were erected around a garden court. To these columns, curtains of white and green and blue, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings, were hung. Then on pavements of red and white and yellow and black marble, couches of silver and gold were placed. The people were invited in, and they did according to every man's pleasure. Wine flowed like water. They drank in vessels of gold, no two

cups being of the same design, "and the royal wine was in abundance according to the bounty of the king." It is the picture of a human debauch as shameless as any that hangs on the walls of history.

VASHTI SUMMONED

Consider next the insulting summons. In another part of the vast palace, Vashti the queen is also giving a feast for the women of the royal household, for what Orientals call the "harem," for what Occidentals call ladies-in-waiting to her majesty the queen. There is nothing said as to any lavish display or voluptuous excess. It was probably respectable. From things which come to light later, we are satisfied there was nothing in Vashti's feast to discredit virtue.

On the last day of the king's carnival, when he was merry with wine, when he was maudlin with drink, when he was stark mad with power, an idea occurs to him. He will parade the queen before that mob of sensuality. He will have Vashti enter like a dancing girl, and show off her physical charms before the princes and the people. And so

he sends seven eunuchs to the harem to fetch her.

It was an insulting proposal under any circumstances, and in any age; but it was doubly so then and there. Read into this story how jealously the women of the East were guarded from the gaze of men, never appearing in public unless veiled, and always kept in guarded and suspicious seclusion. The summons was an insult to womanhood. It was a challenge to virtue. The drunken king would make his beautiful wife hang out her charms before the lecherous eyes of those sated libertines as the climax of his dirty show.

The summons must have astounded Vashti. It must have crimsoned her face with shame. Everything pure and noble in a woman's nature rose up against it. But she is the creature of her lord, and dependent on the whims of her royal spouse. To offend him is to invite death. What shall she do? She does not hesitate. With the courage of virtue she flings his insulting summons back in his face. "Go back to Ahasuerus," she says, "and tell him the queen declines to obey the king's command!"

CONSTERNATION

You can imagine the consternation created by that reply. I fancy the eunuchs trembled as they delivered the message. No one had ever dared to cross the will of this big piece of man power. The whole world is cringing and crawling at his feet. For more than six months the mightiest princes of his kingdom have been purring at his throne, and pouring fulsome flatteries into his ears. And now a woman has dared to twist his neck and box his jaws.

The king was wroth. That does not begin to express it. He was very wroth. His anger burned in him. He was aflame. He was on fire with anger. The idea of a woman presuming to oppose his sovereign will! He has been humiliated in the eyes of the world! This great spectacle of magnificence that has been blazing for six months in the eyes of the nation is suddenly extinguished! And it is a woman's finger that has snuffed out the light! Ahasuerus rages like a caged lion.

He is not the only one that rages. That entire outfit of masculinity flings a fit. They say it is something awful. The offense must

not be allowed to go unrebuked. A gentleman by the name of Memucan delivers quite an oration. Vashti has wronged not only the king, but all the princes. No man is any longer safe. Directly every man's wife will be doing the same thing. If this thing goes on, if women are allowed to treat their husbands in this manner, Memucan seems to indicate that directly all Persia will be feminized.

And so the edict went forth. The royal commandment was written among the decrees of the Medes and Persians that Vashti should come no more before the king, and that her royal estate should go to another. She was deposed. She was disinherited. But no decree of any human king could take from her the jeweled diadem of her own virtue, could strip her of her royal courage, of her splendid daring, of her unstained and unsundered womanhood! All honour to Vashti! Cheers for the woman who cast a cloud on Xerxes' filthy carnival of lust and shame!

VASHTI'S GLORY

The glory of Vashti shines all the brighter

against the dark background of the age in which she lived. Woman's position in the world has improved immeasurably since then. It has improved as a result of the teachings of Christ. What Vashti did would not create much comment nowadays. Here in America we are quite used to this sort of thing. "Americanizing Persia" is a revealing phrase. Woman is no longer a slave, an inferior. She is simply man's equal.

The glory of Vashti is that of a new woman in an old world. She was lonely then. She would be far less lonely now. To be sure, some still decline to recognize the new woman. They feel about her somewhat as the boy felt about the camel in the circus. When it was described to him, he said: "There ain't no sech animal!" Some speak of her with a sneer, but the new woman is here, and she is not only to be reckoned with; for all that makes for human uplift, she is to be counted on. She comes in with democracy, and democracy comes in with Christianity. She asks for a new definition of labour, for a conception that does not confine labour to the hands. A woman may love to make pies and sweep floors, but she can think

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God's thoughts after Him as well as a man, and she insists that the Edenic doctrine of woman as a helpmeet be not revised, but recognized.

The glory of Vashti is that of a woman who was willing to wreck her happiness in order to save her womanhood. Women are not always ready for that. There are women who submit rather than place in jeopardy the little they have, who shut their eyes to what they do not want to see, who try to make best out of worst, and in doing so, must stifle all that is holy in their own natures. It is difficult to know sometimes just what to do, but Vashti never hesitated. She saw her palace of happiness tottering about her, but she stood serene and undismayed, secure in the confidence that her own sense of womanhood had not been soiled.

I think womanhood breathed freer in Persia after that. The decree that uncrowned Vashti went forth, but the fact that the queen had dared to assert her right to virtue and respect heartened the womanhood of the nation, and has helped to hearten the womanhood of the world. It has been a long, steep climb up out of the night, but every woman

A NEW WOMAN IN AN OLD WORLD

who has claimed for herself the right to be true to herself has helped the race up hill.

For you can judge a nation or an age by its treatment of women. A civilization that degrades or cheapens woman is a low and beastly civilization, and a civilization that ennobles and exalts her is by that very sign a civilization of progress and emancipation.

A NEW WOMAN

I have called Vashti a new woman. I mean that she exemplified back there in that dark age some of the qualities which characterize the women who to-day are fighting traditions. She was militant. Decidedly so. She had a courage that did not quail before criticism. She stood unterrified for her rights, and she was willing to fail for the sake of a conviction. These things are great, wherever and whenever you find them.

The glory of a woman of Vashti's type is that in every age she has fought vice, and is the uncompromising foe of injustice and inferiority. Where would the world be but for woman's protest, but for her righteous scorn of things base and low, but for her holy espousal of mercy, virtue, and truth, but for

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her radiant and unconquerable idealism? Down the long road by which the race has traveled toward the land of promise, womanhood has pioneered the way, and for what of the road that remains she can be trusted.

IV

ISAAC AND REBEKAH

An Oriental Courtship

"And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel."—GENESIS 24:64.

THERE is the old story that is always young, of a man and maid and the romance of love. It is the one story which keeps the world from growing old and wearing out.

The story of the courtship and marriage of Isaac and Rebekah is full of human interest. Abraham wanted his son satisfactorily married to one of his own people. He sends his servant away up into Mesopotamia to find Isaac a sweetheart. The manner in which the servant conducted the negotiations reflected great credit on his discernment and diplomatic ability. He seemed to know the way to a maid's heart, and he evidently had an eye for beauty, for Rebekah was fair to look upon. Eminently successful, he returned with the maid, and the record is that "Isaac took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her."

From time immemorial, Isaac and Rebekah have been held up to prospective brides and bridegrooms as an ideal couple, while venerable ministers have invoked on the heads of the newly wed the blessing of the God of Isaac and Rebekah.

PARENTS ARE THE MATCHMAKERS

They were sweethearts who had never seen each other until the marriage had been arranged. It was risky. It is not to be advised, as a rule. Young people who are to marry should know each other well.

The parents of the contracting parties made the match. Young people of our world are not so docile. Suppose a present-day father were to undertake to do for his son what Abraham did for Isaac. What would the son say? Would he walk dumbly to the marriage altar which parental solicitude had provided? Would he meekly assume the vows of a benedict? Not on your life! He would object. Young America would go up in the air. He would insist that the victim has his rights. He would probably regard the girl whom scheming parental anxiety had selected for his helpmeet as the

most unmarried lady in the whole realm of possible and prospective matrimony.

And then what about the young lady herself? Would your modern Rebekah sweetly resign herself to such bargaining? Would she obey the summons from the strange sweetheart in a foreign country to whom marriage was a lottery, and under the escort of the matrimonial ambassador board the Pullman and hie her away to the distant domicile of her waiting spouse? I wot not. Her lover must come to her. He must press his suit. He must prove his affection. He must demonstrate his perfect fitness for the bliss that awaits him. He must be the man of her choice.

In all this we are vastly improved in our method of making matches. To be sure, we still have matchmakers. Some parents insist on attempting the rôle, but it is done less obviously, more diplomatically. Yet even then, it is not to be encouraged. Matchmakers should quit business. They are responsible for a great many unhappy marriages. They are usually influenced by the wrong consideration in promoting and pushing their schemes. A scheming mother

wants her daughter to marry well. Pray, what is marrying well? Is it marrying money and position? Out on such a base and mercenary standard of matrimony! These people who make matches assume too big a responsibility, and one which neither God nor man expects them to assume. They are performing a work of supererogation which no one has asked them to perform. The only person who is qualified to select a husband is the woman who is to marry him, and the only one qualified to select a wife is the man who stands ready to plight his troth till death shall part.

THE RIGHTS OF LOVERS

We are struck with how readily Isaac yielded to the wishes and plans of his father in this matter. He seems to have had no mind of his own. Yet from later information, we discover that he did have some backbone. We wonder if this was the first time Abraham tried to arrange a match for his son? There may have been previous unchronicled and unsuccessful efforts when Isaac, having looked upon the lady, declined to proceed. We cannot be sure. The Bible

is fragmentary. Only so much is told as serves the main purpose of the divine record. On this occasion Isaac may have consented for the negotiations to proceed, cherishing meanwhile the mental reservation that if the young lady failed to please him, he would nullify; and Rebekah may have been meditating somewhat the same course. It was a day, however, when women were little more than chattels, and had small voice one way or the other in deciding their destiny either for time or for eternity.

Things have changed, both for our sons and daughters in the way of larger freedom! Our sons are their own masters by legal statute at twenty-one, and by their own fiat at a considerably earlier age. There are two sides to the question. It is a pity when parental authority dwindles to a mere phrase, and a man is unable to rule his own house. This is the shame of many an American home, and many a boy is going to the devil as a result. On the other hand, the business of parents is to train their children to be not helpless dependents, but self-controlled, self-helping, self-supporting independents.

As for daughters, they do not need the

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feminist movement to give them emancipation. The American girl has long had everything her own way. Sad tales are told of how the woman of to-day is deprived of her rights, of how she is downtrodden and oppressed. It might not be amiss to go back and read the story of a girl who, whether she would or not, was bargained and bartered in the matrimonial market, and from that story learn to what heights woman's rights and womanly privilege have come in the modern world.

LOVE AT FIRST SIGHT

It seems to have been a case of love at first sight. Rebekah was a beauty, and Isaac's heart followed his eyes. She captured him on the spot. Isaac fell head over heels in love. He went in so deep he never got out.

This is the thing that saves the day for married life. Love alone can make us happy. Marriage for any other consideration soon becomes intolerable. The people who throng the divorce courts are as a rule not those who married for love. At their marriage altar an act of blasphemy was committed when, pretending to plight their troth, they went

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through the mockery of a contract negotiated for expediency's sake. If divorce is to decrease, we must not only change some of our laws, but people must stop marrying for money, for position, for diversion, as a method of recreation, and give love the right of way.

Isaac and Rebekah had no pre-nuptial courtship. They missed a lot of fun. But they made up for lost time after they were married. They were sweethearts to the end of their days. Thus it should ever be. The stream of true love, like any other stream, runs its course. In the early stages, a stream is boisterous and tumultuous, as it leaps in gleaming cascades from the hills, or murmurs in the laughing song of its swiftly racing waters; but when it reaches the plain, the flow grows quiet and steady, but does not cease. So is it with the stream of love in wedded life. Its current quiets with the passing years, but its momentum is undiminished.

If love makes the match, people can live happily together, loving each other as husband and wife, from the marriage morning through all life's long day down to the serene

sunset. Much is being written to-day in opposition to all this. An article in a recent magazine represents a young girl as saying that no man could satisfy a woman for longer than three or four years, and that divorce was a necessity because of the limitations of personality. What rot! In the name of Isaac and Rebekah, I give it the lie. In the name of millions of happy marriages in which husband and wife were true to each other in loving union until death dissolved the bond, I give it the lie. In the name of men and women who have lost from their side the companion of life, and who are looking beyond the river for a happy reunion, and who feel that heaven will be incomplete unless they meet again the loved whom they have lost a while, I give it the lie. The reason some people cannot live together but three or four years in marriage is that their marriage was never a real union. It was loveless; it was sacrilege. It was a match made by scheming parents rather than the mating of hearts.

A HAPPY HOME

Rebekah found her sphere in the making

of a home. Was not this sufficient? After all, can a woman find a finer field for self-expression than in a home, than in becoming a wife and mother? I am not decrying modern movements. I am not saying that a woman should have no voice in public affairs. I am not affirming that she should be denied the suffrage. There is much to be said in favour of all this. But these are mere side issues compared with home life. Woman can never unsex herself. God has made her for maternity, and her holiest and sublimest hour is when she has her Bethlehem.

Rebekah's home life was happy because she loved her husband and her husband loved her; but this happiness was affected by certain other things with which the happiness of every home is involved.

It was important for them to live within their income. I suppose they did. They lived when the evil days came not, nor the years drew nigh of wild extravagance in living. It was the era of the simple life. If a young couple want to wreck their happiness, one of the speediest methods of accomplishing the end is to live beyond their means. It is easy to do. There is so much for which to

spend money. The answers of the college girls in a certain university to the question: How much income must your prospective husband have? were recently published. There was a wide difference. The average was sixteen hundred dollars a year. I started life on half that amount. One girl replied that the income was a matter of small importance to her, and that all she asked for was a good man and his love. I was proud of the fact that she was a Southern girl.

It was important for the happiness of the home of Isaac and Rebekah that mutual confidence be maintained. It was not, however, and the fact nearly wrecked the home. Rebekah deceived Isaac, and helped Jacob to steal Esau's blessing. She dissembled, and started a strain of unhappiness which embittered their last years, and whose evil results continued for generations. If husband and wife are to be happy, they must have no secrets from each other. There must be perfect confidence. According to the Scriptures, they are one, and their interests are inseparable.

It was all-important for God to be honoured in their family life. This is the su-

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preme message of the old story to us. God is the Guardian of home, and religion is the one thing which insures its happiness against disaster. Why keep God out? What folly to try to bring up children without religion! What poverty to empty the home of that Presence which is the foundation of character and happiness! Let God in. Give Him a place beneath your roof tree. However humble your home, He will enter, and the glory of His divine Presence will halo the romance of your human love until your home becomes the vestibule of heaven!

V

SAMSON AND DELILAH

A Story of Marital Infidelity

"And it came to pass afterward that he loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah."

—JUDGES 16:4.

HE Bible does not say explicitly that Samson and Delilah were married. We may, however, give them the benefit of the doubt, and assume that back of this verse was a legal marriage ceremony. It was a bad day for Samson when he fell in love with Delilah. It was a worse day for him when he married her. The marriage was a farce, a sacrilege. There at the marriage altar was cemented the plot which sealed the doom of Israel's hero.

In following the love trail of the Bible, we come to that of husband and wife, as illustrated by the story of Samson and Delilah. The love story of Samson and Delilah is not much of a love story. It would better be called a lust story. But we can learn from

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shadows as well as from lights. The message is a warning. It is a story of marital infidelity, of unworthiness on the part of Samson, and of inconstancy on the part of Delilah. Unfortunately it is not an uncommon thing in our day for marriage to tumble down into that kind of a ruin.

MARRIAGE

Marriage is sacred. Protestants do not, indeed, regard it as a sacrament; our notion of a sacrament is something which celebrates an experience in the life of Christ. Marriage is a human relationship. It is not a sacrament, but it is sacred. The most solemn hour in human life is not death with the shutters drawn, with the steps muffled, with the cheeks bathed in tears; but it is the hour when the house is decked in flowers, and the faces are wreathed in smiles, and the hearts are singing for joy because a man and a maid are plighting their nuptial troth.

Marriage is the door to life's supremest happiness. When two people are mated as well as matched, when there is congeniality of temperament, when there is physical, **m**ental and spiritual affinity, when the bond

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of union is love, and the vows are taken in the fear of God, human life on earth has made its nearest approach to celestial happiness. This kind of happiness is within the reach of mortals, and is supposed to be handed across every marriage altar to the newly wed.

What sacrilege when marriage ceases to be sacred! What a tragedy when the door which was thought to open on Paradise enters torment, when the portal to life's supremest happiness turns out to be the gateway to inferno! What a fall when the song dies on our lips, and the marriage flowers wither, and we pass from the ecstasy of wedded joy into a state of strife, discord, and bondage!

The distressing thing is that all too often this is about all people get out of marriage. While I would not say that marriage is a failure, I am forced to admit that many marriages are pitiable, pathetic failures. The glory of the morning has passed away at noon. At the marriage altar, many a man, without knowing it, has signed away every vestige of hope and prospect of earthly happiness. There are fathers who have led their

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daughters to the wedding hour amid the congratulations of friends who said the girl was making a brilliant match; but the father would far better have laid his daughter in the grave.

STAINED VOWS

My text brings before us a story of the desecration of the marriage vow. It recites the ruin of marital joy, and the sacrilege of that holy hour which makes a man and woman husband and wife.

Samson was the Hebrew Hercules. There are many features of similarity in the two stories. The Greeks evidently borrowed from the Hebrews. Samson's birth was supernatural. His mother lived in accordance with divine instructions, that the pre-natal influence might be the best. He was brought up a strict Nazarite, possessing by nature splendid powers which seem to have been magnificently developed. The stories of his exploits all go to show that he was a host in himself, and destined for a great career. He was meant to lead his nation out of vassalage. He was a contemporary of Samuel. Samuel was the spiritual, and Samson the military

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leader. What a combination! With such men at the forefront of the nation's life, glory was at hand.

But Samson had one weakness. It was the weakness many great national leaders have shown, and a weakness which seems peculiarly to beset men of great physical force. He was powerless before women. The Bible relates three of his amorous adventures. The first was with the maid of Timnath, whom he married and deserted. As a result of the treatment of his young wife, she and her unhappy father were burned to death by the Philistines. The second was his affair with the red light lady of Gaza, and the third with Delilah. How many more he had we are not told. But these are enough to lift the curtain and reveal the inner life of a man destined to greatness, but who rotted down into a beast because he lacked self-control.

Delilah was from the valley of Sorek. Sorek means "wine valley." It was a bad combination,—wine and women. She was evidently a Philistine courtesan, a woman of great personal charm, but absolutely unscrupulous. She mated with Samson in cold blood. She was a political adventuress, and

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for eleven hundred pieces of silver bargained to deliver him to his enemies.

The wife betrayed her husband. If Samson's brain had been awake, he might have seen what the woman was about, for three separate times she tried to discover the secret of his strength,—first with the withes, next with the ropes, and then with the web. These incidents should have opened Samson's eyes to her duplicity. But husbands are sometimes slow to suspect, and Samson's blood had put his brain out of business. The hour arrives for Delilah's success. Samson's head is in her lap. Petulantly she charges him with not caring for her, because he will not tell her his secret. Then he blurts it out. He tells her it is his Nazaritic vow. His strength is in his hair that has never been cut. While he sleeps on her knee, she shears his glorious locks, and when he awakes, he is a man no more. The big prize-fighter has become as weak as a baby. His enemies are on him. There is no power to resist. They put out his eyes. Soon he is grinding as a beast of burden. He is worse than a slave. And the woman who has brought it all about is the woman to whom he had given his love.

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The story closes where many a story of marital infidelity ends,—in suicide. Samson could see no other way out. Existence has become intolerable. But in taking his own life he would like to kill the woman who betrayed him, and her confederates. This is the tale of the revel in the temple of Dagon, when Samson with something of his old manhood returned pulls down the pillars and buries himself and his foes in a common destruction. Every few days the papers print a story that parallels this old tale. A man finds that his wife is untrue. A wife finds that her husband is false. There is murder and then there is suicide, and the day which started with a morning fair as heaven ends in midnight black as hell.

THE CAUSES OF UNHAPPY MARRIAGE

What made the union of Samson and Delilah a sacrilege and a tragedy? It was the fact that it was never a real union. It was entered into hastily. Samson saw Delilah, and she pleased him, and he took her. This is the explanation of many a bad marriage to-day. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." Marriage is for life. The time

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to reflect is before the vows are said. "I hope I haven't made a mistake," a man said with a sigh one night, just after I had married him. I told him that his sigh was exactly three minutes too late.

They were of different faiths. Samson was a Jew and Delilah a Philistine. To be sure, neither of them had much religion, but this thing of faith cuts deep, and marriage demands absolute confidence. Of course there are happy marriages where people are of different faiths, but the risk is ever there.

There was no real love in the marriage. It was animalism on the part of Samson, and scheming greed on the part of Delilah. It was a union of lust and greed. How could they be happy? Yet that is about all there is in many a marriage,—just lust and greed, and out of these, people propose to build heaven. All that lust and greed are fit for is to feed the fires of hell. The only thing that can make a happy marriage is love.

The marriage vows were desecrated and dishonoured by Delilah. She never expected to keep them. It was an awful thing to do. What is more infamous than for a woman to plight her troth to a man, and then stain her

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vows? Some are doing it in a more shameless way than Delilah,—not for eleven hundred pieces of silver, but just for the love of sinning. Yet Samson was more to blame. No pity for him! Delilah knew the kind of man she was marrying. She knew his past. Why should she have any respect for such a beast? He was getting what he deserved. He was getting the treatment he had measured out to others. I fancy that as he toiled on in his blindness, the face of the maid of Timnath haunted him by day and by night. We reap what we sow.

MARITAL INFIDELITY TO-DAY

Against the black background of this tragedy, of this tale of a desecrated and defiled marriage vow, I would lift a plea for a revival of the sanctity of marriage. The situation to-day is alarming, and bodes ill to the future of society. We claim to have outgrown polygamy, but divorce simply changes a man's style of driving his domestic chariot. The old style was to drive the horses abreast. The modern matrimonial arrangement is tandem. I am not saying that people should never be divorced. The Bible recognizes

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certain grounds for divorce as valid. There are cases where divorce is the only door left by which to get out of hell. But there are cases, too, in which divorce is only a thin disguise for adultery.

Too much is at stake for the marriage relation to be treated lightly,—home, children, racial integrity, destiny, all are involved. We should stamp on anything that cheapens marriage. There are books published to-day that ought to be burned. They reek with moral contagion. Current fiction seems to proceed on the theory that people should love each other wildly until they are married, and then speedily tire of each other's society and seek an affinity outside the marriage relation.

When a man and a woman are married and discover they have made a mistake, what is the remedy? The answer is not easy. One day I overheard an old negro say: "If you marry a woman and she makes a hell for you, God expects you to leave her." He might have said as much for the man. But I am not so sure his advice is right. Is there not such a thing as playing the man in a trying situation, as being generous and unselfish to

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your husband, to your wife? Let us cast out jealousy and suspicion, and decline to believe anything but the best about each other. Then let us try to get God into the problem. He can mend a broken home. He can resurrect dead joys and bring back the spring. Ask Him to give you again your lost Eden, and if that be not possible, at least to give you strength bravely and honourably to do your part till death's kind angel absolves. Into this discussion of the relation of husband and wife, there sings down from God's great altar the divine law for marriage. The memory of Eden is in its music, and those who heed its message will never stray from the path of flowers. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they twain shall be one flesh; wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder."

VI

JEPHTHAH AND HIS DAUGHTER

A Battle Between Love and Duty

"She was his only child."—JUDGES 11:34.

THERE is a love trail that winds to high levels of heroism. There are things, to be sure, in this old Jewish tale, from which we recoil,—things that belong to a crude and barbarous age. There is the sacrifice of human life. But there are also things here which we hail as life's most splendid achievements,—things which we shall acclaim when the human race has reached the summit of its development.

It is the story of a father and his child, as illustrated by the tragedy of Jephthah and his daughter. The girl's name is not recorded. So complete is the oblivion to which she was consigned as a penalty for her father's vow that not even her name is preserved. She is known simply as her father's daughter. But no oblivion can obscure the glory of her heroic soul, for this Jewish maid fought a fiercer fight than ever soldiers fought on

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earth's red battlefields. It was the battle between love and duty. And she won.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

A blessed relationship is this of father and daughter! What memories it awakens! What happiness it suggests! What dear companionship it suffuses! What self-denial it sanctifies! And what sacrifices it glorifies!

God bestows one of His choicest blessings when He gives a daughter into a home. I have never forgotten or ceased to cherish a remark made to me by a friend the morning our first child was born. He said: "I congratulate you that your first child is a daughter. You will always be grateful to God for that blessing." And so I have. The closeness of companionship, the helpfulness to the mother, the brightening up of family life, the gentle, restraining, refining influence over the other children, all go to make it one of God's choicest blessings when He gives us a daughter for our first born.

"A son is a son 'til he gets him a wife,
But a daughter's a daughter all the days of her life."

The relation between father and daughter

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is one of the dearest of family ties. It is one in which tender affection, romantic attachment, loving pride, and unselfish sacrifice all combine. The fact that the daughter must be sheltered and protected makes its chivalric appeal to paternal manhood, and the fact that her father is her ideal of strength and courage, of honour and manly valour, makes him his daughter's hero, the one man until that other comes to claim her heart and hand. Her father embodies her dream of masculine fidelity, and, perhaps, will continue to be for her until the end of her days the most unselfish man she knows.

What a calamity when a father shatters his daughter's dream, when he topples her ideals into ruin, when he forfeits her respect, when he tumbles from the lofty pinnacle on which her pride had placed him, when, instead of her splendid embodiment of manly virtue and honour, he becomes her confusion, her humiliation and shame!

And what darker tragedy is there than when a daughter disappoints and shames her father's love, dishonours his name, and brings him in sorrow to the grave? It is a sad day in a home when a son strays into the far coun-

try, but the blow is heavier when the daughter falls. The anguish of that hour is unutterable. All the foundations seem to give way, and in the presence of a daughter's shame, bewildered, dazed, a father's love has sometimes frozen into hate; and he has driven from his door the child whose advent into the home the very angels of heaven had seemed to announce.

But the story of Jephthah and his daughter is not the story of a father who turned tyrant. It is not a chapter of shame, but of glory, albeit it is one of tragedy and suffering.

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Jephthah lived a thousand years before Christ, and in interpreting this old story we must remember the rugged days in which the scenes were cast. Jephthah's story is that of a man who fought his way up out of defeat and disgrace to the summit of success, only to have the fruits of victory turn to ashes as they touched his lips.

He was born under the bar sinister. He was an illegitimate son. During his early life he dwelt in his father's house, but one day the legal sons drove him out, saying:

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“Thou shalt not inherit in our father’s house, for thou art the son of a strange woman.” Thus he became an outcast, a man shunned and disgraced. This must have embittered his soul! It is enough to embitter any soul. Jephthah was not to blame for the blot on his birth. Gilead his father was to blame. But society was unjust then, and it is not less unjust now. It continues to punish the innocent. When will it learn to frown, not on the innocent offspring of an illicit union, but on the guilty perpetrators of that injustice?

Jephthah fled to the land of Tob, and there made a place and a name for himself. He gathered wild men about him, for he was a born leader. The freebooters who followed him believed in him, and men began to fear his strength. He had one child, a daughter. Nothing is said of the girl’s mother. We may suppose her dead. The daughter was all he had, his only child, the idol of his heart. He lavished all his affection on her. He was ambitious for her. He did not care for himself, but he would like to have a name in the world that his daughter might be respected.

One day a summons for help comes from

his nation. They need him in the war against the fierce Ammonites. The elders of Gilead say: "Be our captain." That must have been a delicious moment for Jephthah. He is having his revenge. These men who had wronged him are now on their knees to him. He says to them tauntingly: "Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?" The elders cringed. They begged and besought. Jephthah made his own terms. He said: "If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your head?" and the elders replied: "By all means." They were willing to promise anything. But Jephthah knew the kind of cattle he was dealing with, so he took the elders to Mizpah, and made them confirm the compact with an oath.

In all this he was not thinking about himself, but about his daughter. Her time has come now. He is saying to himself: "I will go back and fight, that she may have a place. I will forget my own wrongs. I will wipe out the past, if only my daughter may have

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the position she is entitled to among my people." It is the heart story of many a father's struggle. This is the thing that glorifies fatherhood. He is not thinking of himself. His toils and sacrifices are all for those he loves.

Then comes the day of battle. As he enters the fight, Jephthah makes his ill-fated vow. All is at stake, and he is willing to pay any price for success. He says: "Lord, if thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." With this he goes like the whirlwind of war into battle. He routs Ammon, and fills twenty of their cities with ruin, and makes their valleys run with slaughter. It was a great victory. Flushed with triumph, Jephthah is returning from the conflict. Where are his thoughts? He is thinking that he will be the head of the nation, and his daughter will share his honours. The clouds are gone. The dark days are over. The stain on his name has lifted,

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and Jephthah's house henceforth will rank among the most honourable of Israel. The man's heart overflows with gratitude for the favour of high heaven that has lifted the son of a concubine out of despised obscurity, and made Jephthah's daughter the first lady of the land.

They are drawing near his home. The sound of music floats out on the air. A triumphal procession is coming out to meet Israel's hero. A band of maidens with timbrels and dancing are celebrating the victory. As they draw nearer, Jephthah recognizes the leader of the festive procession. The first person to meet him from his own house as he returns from battle is his own, his only daughter. As he recognizes her, his heart breaks. All his great expectations die. In one brief instant his hopes wither. He staggers like a man stricken to his death. His anguished lips exclaim: "Alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

Watch that Jewish girl as she meets her fierce hour of trial. See her first in the ec-

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stasy of her elation at the news of her father's victory. During the old days of his struggles and resentment, she had sensed more than he imagined of what was going on in his breast. His wrongs hurt her more than they did him. Now her father is coming to his own. She knows the big heart of the man, his splendid qualities of leadership, his manhood that towers head and shoulders above the crowd. At last his day has dawned. His worth will be recognized. She gathers some Jewish maidens to welcome the victor. But she would lead the way. She must be the first to hail him chief, to acclaim him as the nation's head. She feels as every loyal daughter feels whose father has staked all and fought hard and won.

How her father's cry of anguish must have made her heart stand still! She knew nothing of his vow. She is bewildered. She cannot understand just what he means. She only knows that somehow at the summit of their joy the worst has befallen them. Something has dashed their cup of happiness, and in one brief instant morning has changed to midnight.

See her as she throws herself into the

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breach, and bids her father be loyal to duty at any cost. "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." Could anything be more splendid? That slip of a Jewish maid was the real conqueror that day. She vanquished a mightier foe than Ammon ever sent into battle. She won the victory over self in the fight between love and duty. As long as loyalty is honoured and duty revered, Jephthah's daughter deserves a high place in the annals of human heroism.

She makes but one request. There is an unutterable pathos about it. She says: "Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountain and bewail my virginity." She is not protesting against the horror of laying her young cheek against the sacrificial fire on the flaming altar as a burnt offering to satisfy her father's rash vow. The thing that is heavy on her heart is that her father's house must end. She is his only child, his sole hope of succession. And so, just when he has won his way into fame his house must become extinct and the name of Jephthah fade from the annals of his race.

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The melancholy story closes with a bare statement of how at the end of two months she returned to her father and he did unto her according to his vow. Whether her fate was in being offered as a burnt offering, as the narrative seems to affirm, or in being doomed to perpetual virginity, as some prefer to believe, matters little. The thing which befell her was the worst that could befall her, short of dishonour, short of shame; but neither shame nor dishonour did befall her, for in the battle between love and duty, duty for love's sake won.

THE PRESENT DAY MESSAGE

This old story of a father and his daughter speaks to us of the sacrifices of a daughter's love. They are among the holiest and bravest of life, and you will find them in nearly every home. Yonder is a girl putting her young life aside, casting out of her heart the things a girl loves most, because home needs her, because an aged father or mother requires her care. Honour such devotion. But do not presume on it. There is such a thing as heedless youth, but there is also such a thing as selfish age.

It speaks to us of how a daughter may help her father play the man in the crises of life. If his daughter had wavered or protested, could Jephthah have gone on? But she was the stronger of the two. She never hesitated, but took the thing in her own hands, and brought it to sublime completion. How often a word from a girl's lips, a touch of her hand on a man's arm, has saved the day when honour was hard driven by duty!

It speaks of the nobility of plain devotedness to duty. There is nothing greater than this. It is a glorious thing when love and duty travel the same path, but when they clash, there is only one course for a high soul. Duty must be done at any cost.

It speaks also of the high and holy character of our obligations to God. The race has progressed since the days of Jephthah. We have a nobler conception of God than to try to please Him with a vow that calls for human sacrifice. But we have not progressed beyond the days of Jephthah in the sense of our obligation to God. His rights are supreme. He must ever have our best. He has made us for Himself, and our lives are perfected only in Him. Into this discussion

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rings without a discord the noblest statement ever made of life! “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

VII

RUTH

The Romance of a Loyal Heart

"But Ruth clave unto her."—RUTH 1:14.

HERE is nothing more beautiful in the language of the heart than Ruth's declaration of devotion to Naomi. It comes to us over the lips of a mountain maid who dwelt on the plains of Moab.

It is all the more eloquent because it was addressed to a mother-in-law. "And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee; for whither thou goest I will go, and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people and thy God my God; where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

With this declaration Ruth stretches stark and stiff in death many a rude gibe and coarse jest aimed at one of the most delicate and difficult of human relations. The

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mother-in-law must take the place of the natural mother. She must be as keen to divine, as swift to succour, as untiring to serve, as unselfish in conduct, as loyal in attachment, and as undying in love as though the child were sprung from her own body. And she must do all this unhelped and unstirred by the passions and incentives which the mystery of motherhood dissolves in the blood.

To meet these sacred and delicate responsibilities and discharge them with such fidelity as to merit the benedictions of the dead and the praise of the living is to have made life worth while. Such a woman must have been Naomi, the mother-in-law of Ruth, and when the young wife of her dead son looked into the older woman's face saddened by many a sorrow, chastened by many a trial, and said: "No, mother, we must not separate; we will fare on hand in hand and share life's lot together," it was like a sunlit summit on a long road to a weary heart.

The book of Ruth fairly radiates human interest. It is a love story, but vastly more. In four brief chapters the many moods of a changing life follow each other in swift succession. Disaster, famine, exile, adventure,

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romance, sickness, bereavement, death, want, despair, loneliness, devotion, determination, fate, fortune, deliverance, destiny, are all in the story, and behind the changing scenes "standeth God amid the shadows keeping watch upon His own."

MOAB

The story opens with the sojourn in the country of Moab. It was a thing that happened often in a land of desert and drought. "There was a famine in the land." A man and his wife and their two sons leave their home in Bethlehem on the crest of the Judean hills and travel afoot down the hot, dusty road that drops to the Jordan, and then over the river and up the mountain to Moab in search of bread and a way to live.

You can watch them as they go on together. About all they have is each other. The sons are still young enough to take care lightly, but the father and mother are depressed, and talk often with each other of their problems and anxieties. They hope and pray that a better day may come.

And yet, despite it all, they are not so forlorn, for they have something more precious

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than bread, richer than wealth. They have no roof over their heads, no wages coming in to ward off care and fear and worry. They have neither work nor friends. But they have a God in Whom to trust, and they have each other. Hence the journey must have had its stretches of joy.

Reaching Moab, new friends are soon made. Work is found. A patch of ground is secured. A garden is on the way. The skies are clearing. They are hungry no more, lonely no more. They have enough and to spare. The God of Israel has been good to them, even in this land of strangers. Naomi's heart is filled with thanksgiving. Then the blow falls. One day death knocked at the door, and when he was gone, Naomi is left a widow, sitting in the shadow with a new grave yonder which tells that at least one of those who came will not return.

RUTH ENTERS THE PICTURE

The Jews do not care for intermarriage with the Gentiles. Perhaps Naomi did not think of this when she turned her steps toward Moab. The famine crowded other things out of mind. But when she was

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climbing the Moabitish hills she was on the way to mate her sons with heathen women. How strangely the stream of life finds its channel!

“Two there shall be the whole wide world apart.”

An unseen hand fashions destiny. A word, a look, a chance meeting, an accidental delay, and two hearts meant to mate have met and loved.

So it was with the Jewish youth from Bethlehem and the Moabitish maid. They met, and he wooed and won his wife there in the land of strangers. There was probably opposition on the part of Naomi to the marriage. It was contrary to the customs and traditions of her people. She must have urged delay, and told the boy if he would marry he should go back to Judah for his wife. But what are customs and traditions when the heart is young and love claims the right of way?

This was Ruth's real romance,—not her second marriage with rich Boaz. That was later. That was when the blood had cooled. It was when the union was built on custom

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and expediency. She was not unhappy with Boaz, for she respected him, and he was good to her, and his money kept Naomi from suffering and need. But it was back in the land of Moab that she drank life's finest wine and love ran riot in her blood.

The Jewish author of this idyl does not write the Moabitish courtship into his story. Why should he? But it is easy for the imagination to fill in. Ruth and Naomi's son must have loved each other much. The fact that there was opposition to the union only strengthened their attachment to each other. Probably Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law was largely a by-product of her love for Naomi's son. She was thinking of him when she said: "Entreat me not to leave thee, nor to return from following after thee." It is wonderful what a woman will do for the man she loves.

THE RETURN TO JUDAH

There are three graves in Moab, and three widows to face a gray to-morrow. Naomi's mind is made up. She will not be a burden. Then no doubt the heights of Bethlehem are calling to her lonely heart. She will manage

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somehow. And so she says to Orpah and Ruth: "Return to your people, and I will go to mine." But they decline and go on with her. She tells them it must not be, and gives them her blessing and sends them back and journeys on down the long, steep path which winds to the valley where the Jordan like a silver ribbon marks the boundary between Moab and Canaan.

Orpah has turned back, but not Ruth. She follows Naomi. She will not leave her. She must care for her, share with her. They must suffer together, and if need be, die together. She can hear her dead husband's voice bidding her go on, and when Naomi tries to turn her back, the love that can never die is shining in Ruth's eyes, and her loyal heart is at her lips as she says: "Where thou goest I will go; where thou lodgest I will lodge; where thou diest will I die."

It was her duty, and that was enough. She kept back nothing. She put all into her vow, even her country and her God. Ruth had no home to give Naomi, no fortune, but she gives her something better. She gives herself. She gives her love. It is what many an aged woman most craves in that hour of

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widowed loneliness when she waits at the sunset for the home call.

And so the two women walk the road together, cross the river hand in hand, climb the hill side by side; no matter what life may hold, they share alike.

ENTER BOAZ

Boaz is to be Ruth's second husband, only as yet neither knows the web which fate is spinning. And there is romance in this second marriage, too. But it is the romance of afternoon rather than of rosy dawn. It is the romance of a Providence that watches over and guides the wandering feet of one who had surrendered all for duty. It is the romance of that strange shift in life's scenery which so often comes to pass when

"Sudden the worst turns the best to the brave."

The courtship of Boaz was characteristically Oriental, but as chaste as the morning dew. Even when he was in his cups he was a gentleman. The old man instantly loses his heart to the lovely young widow gleaning in his fields at harvest time. He orders his ser-

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vants to be wasteful of grain that Ruth may have a double portion when the day is done. Finding that the Jewish law of next kinsman gives him the chance to win her for his wife, with the quaint chivalry of the land he fulfills the conditions, and the fair Moabitess becomes his for better, for worse.

Want is left behind now by Ruth and Naomi. The days of trial and anxiety come no more. Ruth is happy, happy because her mother-in-law is comfortable, happier because he who sleeps in a grave on a far-off hillside is saying: "Sweetheart, well done!", happy because she has been loyal to duty. A loyal heart suffers no defeats. For Ruth no less than for the Iron Duke,

"The path of duty has been found the path of glory,
He who ever following her commands
On with toil of head and heart and hands
Through the deep gorge to the far light
Has won his way upward and prevailed
Shall find the toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining tableland
To which our God Himself is sun and shield."

But Boaz is not the end of this love story. Choices made to-day strangely shape far future events.

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“To-day we fashion destiny,
The web of fate we spin,
To-day for all eternity
Choose we holiness or sin.”

When Ruth made her vow to Naomi there on the hillside in Moab, the Christ Who was born at Bethlehem was waiting down on the winding love trail her feet had taken. To Boaz and Ruth was born a son named Obed, whose grandson was David, and from David's line came the Christ. And so the mountain girl who married a poor boy in the land of Moab and left her country and her altars to see that his mother did not suffer need stepped up into the ancestral line of the world's Redeemer, to Whom countless thousands have made the vow of the loyal heart, saying with the sign of the cross: “O, Christ, Son of God, Saviour of men, whither Thou goest I will go, and where Thou lodgest I will lodge; Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God.”

VIII

JONATHAN AND DAVID

The Glory of a Pure Friendship

"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

—I SAMUEL 18:1.

ERE is a human relationship forged of pure gold, unmixed and unalloyed with any element of selfish advantage, and that depended for its creation and cultivation on no tie of blood or race or sect or sex. It is a tie that was formed and that flourished in the sheer devotion two men, who had all the world to keep them apart, cherished for each other. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul."

We are to dwell, not on the tie which binds parent and child, a father to his offspring, a mother to her sons and daughters, for nature is the basis of these dear bonds, and we cannot repudiate them without being unnatural.

THE GLORY OF A PURE FRIENDSHIP

We are to consider, not the tie which binds husband and wife, or man and woman, for sex of necessity plays a large part in such relations. I am not denying that there is such a thing as pure Platonic friendship between a man and a woman, but I am saying that it is next to impossible to eliminate from such friendships the subtle influence of sex. I have seen so many of these Platonic friendships which started Plato, but which ended Romeo and Juliet.

I am reciting a friendship between man and man, or, if you please, between woman and woman; a friendship between two people who are drawn together, not by the ties of nature, not by the affinities of sex, not by any considerations of earthly advantage, but by the simple fact that their souls are knit together in a pure and unselfish devotion.

THE WORTH OF FRIENDSHIP

The value of friendship is great. God has built into human nature the longing and need for friends. We get lonely and homesick for kindly companionship. Hell is the far country where there are no friends. It is hard to travel life's rough, steep road alone.

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No man liveth to himself if he can help it. A man without friends is one whose cup is emptied of happiness.

God's effort seems to be to make people friendly. It is not so much to force certain views upon us as it is to induce us to build our human relationships under the influence of love. "Thou shalt love" is the divine commandment. "Thou shalt be friendly." Salvation is a social achievement. We cannot enter heaven alone.

Even Godhood seems to be subject to a sense of the same need. The great Father is ever seeking the love of His children. He wants no obedience that is empty of love. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Christ longs for friends. He said to His disciples: "I have not called you servants, but friends."

To many a man in the stress and conflict of life, the tide of battle has turned toward victory with the face of a friend. How often the whole story of resisting temptation and of being loyal to duty is told in a single line. "I had a friend. Some one stood by who cared, who cheered, who said: 'It is everything to me whether you succeed or fail.'"

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We can help each other with the mere fact of friendship. It seems possible along its wireless connections to flash messages of courage and will power and victory.

And so among the great treasures of life are our friends. More precious than property, than books and pictures, of greater value than all our things, are the faces of friends. In the will of Justice Lamar of Mississippi was found an unusual bequest. To his children he said he bequeathed his friendships, numerous and precious, in the hope that they would be prized and cultivated. It is a cheap life that does not value friends, that does not take time to make them and keep them.

PURE FRIENDSHIP

This love trail was followed by feet lured by the glory of a friendship that was pure. Unfortunately sometimes friendship is an alloy, mixed with a baser passion, with some ambition that is ignoble and unworthy. Sometimes friendship is simply a veneer, sometimes a worthless counterfeit. There are people who, feigning friendship, seek it for what they can get out of it. They expect

their friends to boost them in business, to help them climb the social ladder, to assist them in the effort to capture popularity and respectability. Sometimes men bind themselves in clubs and circles, engaging to work for each other's material interests. Such circles may have their uses, but it is a misnomer to call them circles of friendship, for they are thoroughly selfish. A man who has plenty of money to spend may easily acquire friends of a certain kind. They flock to him like flies around a honey bowl. But when the bowl is empty, such friends take wings and seek another victim. When the prodigal son came to himself and found that his money was gone, he looked around for his friends and found that they were gone, too. The hogs were the only companions left.

There are men who have seen their friends fall away in the day of trouble, when selfish advantage counseled desertion. There are base souls who do not hesitate to sacrifice a friendship on the altar of selfish advantage. This thing goes on in business. Judas Iscariot was not the only man to sell out a friend for dirty dollars. We see it in politics. It seems to be a part of the game. There, a

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man is not expected to stand by his friends when his friends stand in his way.

It is hard to keep from growing cynical and pessimistic when in the time of trial and calamity one sees his friends falling away, growing cool and distant and irresponsible, evidently concerned lest they be involved in or affected by the fallen fortunes of one whom a while ago they claimed as a friend. When all went well, friendship was a pleasant thing, but when it meant shouldering a burden, sharing a disgrace, walking in a shadow, straightway friendship became undesirable. Such friendship is chaff, withering in the fierce heat of trial; it has no roots. Such friends are smirking sycophants, greedy parasites, unscrupulous traffickers in that which is holy.

It is great when friendship is pure. It should of course be candid. It is a great thing to have a friend who is honest enough to tell you of your faults. Of course the thing can be overdone. Canning says:

“Give me the avowed, the erect, the manly foe,
Bold I can meet—perhaps may turn his blow,
But of all plagues, good Heaven, thy wrath can send,
Save, save, oh! save me from the candid friend.”

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The candid friend who is of value must be kindly rather than caustic. But the great thing about a pure friendship is that it is not for sale. No man's thirty pieces of silver or mint of gold can bribe it. It is unselfish. It "seeketh not its own." It is willing to pay the utmost price. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

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Such a pure friendship is illustrated by the old story of Jonathan and David. The Greek parallel is that of Damon and Phintias. Phintias was unjustly condemned to death by Dionysius the tyrant. Permission was given him to go to a distant place in order to arrange his affairs on condition that his friend remain as a pledge of his return. Damon surrendered and waited in prison ready to suffer death should Phintias not return. Phintias was unavoidably delayed. Damon was about to be executed. People were murmuring at the injustice, when Phintias suddenly rushed into the arms of Damon, and each friend demanded that he be allowed to die for the other. Dionysius

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moved by such a spectacle of devotion relented and pardoned both. Such is the Greek idyl of a pure friendship, and so lovely is it that both our English and German poets have recited it in their ballads. But the idyl of Jonathan and David is more romantic, more dramatic, more tragic.

Jonathan was the eldest son of King Saul. He was his father's pride and hope. He was regarded as the heir to the throne. Saul made him a close companion. He sat with the king at meals, and was in training for the high position to which he was heir. His martial gifts were great. A single incident throws light on his splendid courage and daring. It took place at the battle of Gibeah. A mountain pass was held by a strong force of the enemy. With only his armour bearer, the young prince sallied forth to attack. A panic seized the enemy. It spread. Terror was added by an earthquake. As the confusion increased, the enslaved Israelites mutinied. The soldiers of Saul, who had been hiding in the caves, sprang out and joined in the conflict. The king watched the scene from the heights of Gibeah, astonished at the wild retreat of his foes, only to learn

later that Jonathan was the hero of the day, and that, single-handed, he had routed an army. Such are the measures of the youth. He was no weakling. He was born to lead and rule.

There came a day when a new influence entered Jonathan's life. It was the day David slew Goliath. Then for the first time Jonathan and David met. Jonathan saw the young shepherd lay aside the armour and venture forth with his sling and stone to the combat which ended in the death of the giant of Gath. His enthusiasm was boundless. At last he had met his hero. He stood by while Abner introduced David to Saul, and listened to David's modest account of himself. "Then the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." Probably complying with Jonathan's request, Saul took David to the palace. Soon the young men enter into a life covenant. According to the old custom their veins were opened. The blood of each is transfused into the veins of the other. The terms of agreement are sealed with the blood of both. As a pledge of his fealty, "Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was

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upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword and to his bow and to his girdle." He gave him his robe, the symbol of his lineage, his sword, the symbol of his military rank, his bow, the symbol of his martial prowess, and his girdle, the symbol of his right to the throne. The pledge was absolute. Each belonged to the other, for better, for worse, in life or in death.

All went well until Saul's insane jealousy cast its awful shadow over their friendship. At length the king attempts to take David's life, and the young man flees for safety. Then begins the ignoble quest in which the king, with an army at his back, scours the mountain fastnesses in the effort to hunt down the fugitive shepherd youth.

How does Jonathan bear himself during this trying period? His part is not easy. Pope says:

"A generous friendship no cold medium knows,
Burns with one love, with one resentment blows,
One should our interests and our passions be,
My friend must hate the man who injures me."

Jonathan is devoted to his father, but he

is not faithless to his friend. More than once he saves David's life. One day Saul bluntly says to Jonathan: "Kill David." What is Jonathan's answer? Having warned David of his peril, he takes a walk with the king, and in the course of the conversation, as love only could do it, he goes over the story of how the shepherd boy had come into the camp and slain Israel's foe. Soon the king's evil mood passes, and Saul says: "David shall not be slain." We can imagine the happiness of the two young men as David once more returns to the king's house.

But soon Saul's ugly mood returns, and David flees again for his life. He says to Jonathan: "There is but a step between me and death." Again Jonathan tries to soften the king's anger, but this time without avail. Enraged, Saul says to Jonathan: "Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman, do not I know that thou hast chosen the son of Jesse to thine own confusion? For as long as the son of Jesse liveth upon the ground, thou shalt not be established, nor thy kingdom." Then Saul hurls a javelin at Jonathan, and Jonathan rushes out to shoot the arrow that will warn David of his peril. They meet

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in the place of concealment, and having "kissed each other and wept sore," and having renewed the covenant, Jonathan bids David go in peace. Neither his father's anger nor the prospect of losing the throne could tempt him to fail his friend.

David is also constant. More than once the opportunity is given him to take Saul's life, but he declines, not merely because Saul is the Lord's anointed, but also, I think, because he is the father of his friend.

Jonathan and David meet for the last time in the forest of Ziph. They talk over their troubles, they renew their vows. Jonathan strengthens David in God, which means, I think, that the two young men prayed together, and then Jonathan said to David: "Fear not; thou shalt be king." What would the average politician or business man think of that kind of unselfishness? The two friends say good-bye, not knowing what is to befall them, but each nerved to loyal duty and to noble deeds by the fact of their friendship.

Then comes the fatal battle of Gilboa. In desperation, Saul takes his own life. Around him, and fighting to save him, fall three of

his sons. Among them is Jonathan. Their bodies are burned. The news reaches David in his hiding place. Saul is dead. He is safe now. He will be hunted no more. The throne is waiting for him. Instead of fleeing from cavern to cavern, he will soon be the king of Israel. But there is no elation, for Jonathan is also dead, and in as tender an elegy as ever poured forth from an anguished and stricken heart, David laments his friend. "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan. Very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!"

Such is the old Hebrew story of the glory of a pure friendship. Thank God for friends! Dearer than money, than place and position, than earthly honour and advantage, more precious than thrones and power, than even life itself, is a true friend. It is enough to have friends. What a disaster to lose them! Worse than a disaster is it to betray them, to break the covenant of friendship, to

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sacrifice friends for selfish advantage, and fail them in their hour of need.

Over this old story shimmers the light of a celestial friendship. Jesus sweetens, ennobles, purifies, sanctifies and glorifies our human friendships with His own holy love. He offers to become our friend. Earthly friends at best are few, and they often fail us in life's sorest need. Jesus is a Friend that "sticketh closer than a brother," and He has sealed the blood covenant of friendship on Calvary's cross!

IX

RIZPAH

The Love Trail of Motherhood

"And Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night."

—2 SAMUEL 21: 10.



THIS is the story of a mother's devotion. It is a recital of maternal heroism. It is a chapter of mother love that for unfailing and unfaltering attachment, for grim and splendid and courageous endurance, for high and holy and unselfish devotion to duty, has never been surpassed.

A MOTHER'S HEROISM

The mother was Rizpah. She was an humble woman, a foreigner by birth, a Hivite, the daughter of Aiah from Zibeon. She seems to have had few friends, and no

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earthly station. Her lot was a hard one. Her position was one of inferiority. She was Saul's concubine. While according to the lax moral standards of the day this did not involve her in disgrace, it did brand her with inferiority. She was what to-day might be called the morganatic wife of a king. To Saul she bore two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth.

The seven young men who were the victims of this tragedy were not all Rizpah's sons, though they were all her boys. Two of them were her sons, and five were Saul's grandsons, the sons of Merab, Saul's eldest daughter. Rizpah had probably cared for them in their childhood, and they had learned to love her. She was perhaps the only real mother they had ever known. They were almost, if not quite, as dear to her as her own sons. Such cases of devoted attachment on the part of a foster mother are not unusual.

After the death of Saul and Jonathan, they seem to have resided at Mahanaim. After the fall of the royal house, the remnant of Saul's family fled across the border to this fortified city, and found refuge there. Riz-

pah seems to have been the one on whose shoulders most of the responsibility rested, and with unfailing fidelity, the faithful soul strove to fulfill her sacred trust to the living and to the dead.

For three years there had been a famine in the land, probably produced by marauding bands of Gibeonites who destroyed the growing crops in the open fields. The situation had become desperate. David found himself unable to cope with it. Finally he calls in the Gibeonites, and asks them on what terms they will consent to desist from devastating the land. He discovered that they had a deep-seated grievance against Saul and his house. It seemed that the Israelites had made a vow with the Gibeonites, but that Saul had wantonly violated the vow, and massacred a number of their people. Now they are bent on vengeance. They tell David that they do not care to kill any of his people, but they do want to get even with Saul, and that if he will deliver to them seven of Saul's sons to be slain, the depredations will cease. David consented. It was not to his credit that he did. Perhaps it was the best he could do under the circumstances,

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but it was craven and cowardly. He may have reasoned that it was better for seven to die than for the whole nation to perish, but the act was ignoble. To these bloodthirsty, vengeful Gibeonites he delivered the two sons of Rizpah, and the five grandsons of Saul.

Then the horror was enacted. It took place on top of the rock of Gibeon, at the very spot where Saul had stood and watched the flight of the Philistines the day Jonathan, single-handed, attacked them in the pass, routing the garrison, and driving the army into headlong flight. Little did Saul realize as he stood there the awful deed that was to be committed on his posterity at that very spot a few years later. On this high and naked rock, which was probably a mountain peak, the horror was enacted. Seven gaunt and spectral crosses were erected there against the blistering summer sky, and on these seven crosses the seven sons of Saul were crucified. Was there ever such a gibbet? Was there ever such heathenish butchery and brutality? The seven lifeless bodies were left hanging on the seven crosses in mute and woeful warning against the future

violation of a vow made to the men of Gibeon.

And now comes Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, and the foster mother of his children. She must have been an aged woman by this time. Yonder she comes, weary and heart-broken, climbing the steep, stony path up to the barren summit of the rock on which stand the seven gaunt crosses bearing the lifeless bodies of her beloved. Her mother heart is anguished, and she is sore bereft. All that the world holds dear to her is there in that terrible crucifixion. She carries a heavy burden on her tired shoulders as she slowly and laboriously makes her way up the rough path. As she comes nearer, we discover that her bundle is sackcloth, the ancient uniform of sorrow.

Spreading her mantle of mourning on the rock, in the presence of her dead, at the foot of the seven crosses, Rizpah begins her long and lonely and awful vigil. She does not leave the spot by day nor by night. When the birds of prey would light by day on the bodies of the dead, she drives them away, and when darkness falls, she kindles the

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watch fire and protects the bodies from the wild beasts which prowl in the night time. Day after day this wonderful woman remains at her self-elected task, with none to praise her, with none to comfort, perhaps with pitying strangers now and then to bring her a morsel of food, nursing in her anguished heart her lonely sorrow, and finding some ease of grief in her ministry to the bodies of her dead.

“When death, inexorable, has bereft us,
When all we can is done and all is said,
What other only solace is there left us,
What comfort save the caring for our dead?”

Day follows day, and night follows night. The slow weeks drag by. From the beginning of barley harvest until the October rains begin to drop water out of heaven, Rizpah maintains her vigil of maternal love. At last they tell David about it. I do not envy him his feelings in that hour. I think his sense of shame must have been well-nigh unendurable. He is stung to the quick, and attempts to make a tardy reparation. Sending to Jabesh-gilead for the bones of Saul and Jonathan that have been stolen from the

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street of Bethshan where the Philistines had hanged them, and gathering the seven bodies from the crosses on the top of the rock of Gibeon, he gives them royal burial in the ancestral sepulchre of Kish. It does not say who were the mourners at that strange funeral, but I fancy that one aged woman followed the bodies to their final rest, and that through her tears there shone a light of comfort, for at last her lonely watch was ended, and to her beloved has been given decent interment.

“And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.” What a vigil! What heroism! What devotion! What mother love! I know of no story of maternal affection in either sacred or profane literature that for pathos, for steadfast affection, for sublime and unselfish heroism, surpasses this. Under its spell, let us get a new conception of the glory of a mother’s love, and a new sense of what we owe to her who gave us birth, and

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in whose dear face we catch our first glimpse of heaven, our first radiant vision of divinity.

THE GLORY OF A MOTHER'S LOVE

The glory of a mother's love is its unselfishness. A true mother thinks of herself last. She is daily laying down her life for her loved ones. She takes the roses out of her own cheeks, and puts them into the faces of her children. Her burden is not light, but she bears it uncomplainingly, for it is a part of her holy ministry. Her world is away from publicity. She has no headlines. God alone reads much of the story of her devoted service.

The glory of a mother's love is its faith. Great is a mother's faith. She believes when all others have begun to doubt. She sees good where others see only evil. She believes the best about us. This is the thing that saves the day for many a man. There is nothing left to live for when every one has lost faith in you, but so long as one true heart says: "I believe in you," you can fight on. How often we are strengthened in the hour of temptation by the high faith of a mother's

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love! She would not believe this of you. I cannot and I will not disappoint her.

The glory of a mother's love is its divine, its almost infallible intuition. Our mothers read us through and through. They are mind readers. They read with a sympathetic understanding. They sense the situation, and we never seek their sympathy in vain. The world may turn against us, but there is one loyal heart that follows us out to Calvary and keeps the vigil of love through the long night of our loneliness and trial.

The glory of a mother's love is its great expectation, its splendid hope. What dreams a mother's love weaves across the face of her baby as she cuddles it in her arms! How she dips into the future! What pictures her imagination paints! How beautiful your life would be if it could only measure up to the dreams and hopes of your mother's love! If you could only get a glimpse of that, it would stir you, it would fire you with a high and holy ambition, it would help you to be a better man.

The glory of a mother's love is its solicitude. How she yearns over her children! What vigils she keeps! What prayers she

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offers! How her heart leaps into her face as she waits and watches! Sometimes we think maternal love over-anxious. Practical, unsentimental, matter-of-fact people would say that Rizpah was wasting her time there on the rock. What good can she do? Her boys are dead. Let the dead bury their dead. Ah, but the holiest things in life are sentiments! They are heart-beats. Many a man has won the victory because he knew that somebody cared. A mother was waiting and watching for the first news of how he fared in his struggle with the world.

The glory of a mother's love is its loyalty. Nothing on earth can make your mother turn against you. She will face poverty, disgrace, death itself, for your sake. We see it over and over again,—in some withering pestilence, in some blighting contagion. Does the mother stand back and try to protect herself? Not she. She has forgotten herself. She gladly shares disgrace and defeat with her loved ones. Hers is a sacrificial heroism. "Greater love hath no man than this." Her sufferings are vicarious. The more we need, the more love she gives. Sometimes she seems a bit partial, but it is because one child

needs more than another. There is no limit to a mother's love.

THE DEBT TO OUR MOTHERS

Let us be good to our mothers. Let us care for them while they are with us. It is something to wear a white flower in their honour. It is better to wear the flower of a white life, to give them daily a kindly considerateness and a loving care, for we cannot keep them with us much longer. Let us not be unmindful of their physical needs. There is nothing baser than to neglect to care for her who has suffered so much for you. I once met an aged woman in an almshouse whose children were fairly well-to-do, but they had sent her there because they did not care to be burdened with the old woman. She was eating her heart out with loneliness and disappointment. Shame on such unnatural apostasy, such betrayal of life's most sacred obligation!

But there are greater than physical needs. There is a heart hunger. There are mothers who look and look for a letter from their absent children. The days pass and nothing comes. Why does he not write? "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick."

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If death has claimed her, we can be true to her memory. I wonder if she is not near us. I am sure she is if it be possible. I believe my mother is still praying for me. Let us think of our beloved dead. Let us try to realize their hopes and prayers for us, and show that their sacrifices were not in vain. Earth has wireless connections with heaven, and there is joy in heaven over a sinner that repenteth. Who knows but it is possible to make a sainted mother's cup of happiness brim with a fuller joy at the news that her beloved have come home to God?

Over this old story of a mother's love, of her unfaltering fidelity and heroic devotion, wisdom sounds her call. "My son, forsake not the law of thy mother. Bind it continually upon thine heart, and tie it about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee. When thou sleepest, it shall keep thee, and when thou awakest, it shall talk with thee."

X

JEZEBEL

The Love of a Strong Woman for a Weak Man

"And Jezebel his wife said unto him, . . . Arise and eat bread, and let thine heart be merry; I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth, the Jezreelite."

—1 KINGS 21:7.

 JEZEBEL was pagan. If it be true that "the gods men worship write their names on their faces," some allowance must be made for Jezebel, on the score of her religion. An idolatry that was sensual and cruel lifted itself in the background of her life. She was doubtless honest in her beliefs. She certainly clung to them with a fearless tenacity that deserved a better creed.

We wonder what such a woman might have done for her country and her age had her childhood been steeped in the pure and uplifting worship of Jehovah.

The love trail that runs past Ahab's ivory palace in Jezreel is the affection of a strong woman for a weak man. Perhaps Jezebel never knew how badly she was mismated, but

she seems to have loved, and she was certainly true to her weak spouse. Love-light ever casts a halo, but it was put to the test when its task was to find any measures of heroic stature in a king who could turn his face to the wall and cry like a baby when he could not have the little piece of ground he wanted.

Despite all this, Jezebel planned for him, not always with either honour or honesty, but with a daring and swift dispatch which captures our admiration. She determined that Ahab should be happy, should have what he wanted. She was as much a mother as a wife to this spoiled weakling to whom she was mismated. Nothing daunted or dismayed her. She had her way, but her way was routed not to add anything to her own happiness, but to bring to the king the things on which he had set his heart. As the scenes shift in the story, the woman never once loses her nerve. She was game and resourceful until the final moment when the curtain drops and at Jehu's raw command the scared eunuchs hurl her from the palace window to be dashed to death on the stones below.

Jezebel was a Phœnician, and had all the

stern and fierce traits of the race from which she sprung. She combined with these an Oriental recklessness which made the reign of herself and her weak husband a calamity to Israel. Their capital was at Jezreel. Located on a slight eminence in the lovely and fertile valley of Esdraelon which swept from the sea for many miles back toward the hills, it was the richest part of Palestine. In Jezreel Ahab had built an ivory palace. The palace swarmed with the idolatrous devotees of Baal and Astarte, four hundred and fifty priests of Baal and four hundred of Astarte feeding at the royal table. There amid such surroundings this strange pair held court, and from this court a moral plague spread through the land.

THE PORTRAIT OF JEZEBEL

There are three incidents related with some minuteness in the Bible from which we may form our estimate of this remarkable woman. The first is her attempt to intimidate Elijah. The prophet is fresh from his great victory. The false worship of Baal and Astarte had been overthrown. It was a dramatic scene there on Mount Carmel,

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when Elijah goaded his antagonists to desperation and then, after they had failed, had called upon his own God Jehovah to answer by fire. God honoured His servant, and Elijah's altar leaped into flame. He then slaughtered the priests of Baal and Astarte, meting out to them the same treatment that had been meted out to the prophets of his own faith. It was an age of blood.

Elijah is elated over his victory. He is the reformer of Israel. He is the emancipator of his nation. He prays now for rain, and the clouds gather. The long drought is soon to be broken. Surely the king must rejoice that he has thrown off the yoke of Baal. As the rain begins to fall, and the famine to recede, the people will rejoice that they have returned to the worship of the true God.

But Elijah had forgotten Jezebel. She has not been converted. Her priests had been slain, her will defied. Elijah has conquered on Mount Carmel, but he will never conquer in Jezreel. She is not afraid of his God of fire. She defies Him. Elijah has fooled Ahab, but he will never fool her. And so she sends the prophet the message, hot with scorn and hate: "So let the gods do

to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time."

All at once, Elijah's soul withered. He was scared. He knew it was no idle threat. Here was a foe he had not counted on. He could face Ahab and a thousand priests on Carmel, but when this lady from Jezreel marches down on him with her fiery anathema, he does not even hesitate. He has no notion of risking an engagement. He makes a break for the desert, and does not draw an easy breath until he reaches a seclusion where he feels she cannot find him. There in the desert the hero of Carmel gives way to despair. "It is enough, O God. Take away my life." Jezebel is still on the throne. Paint this into her portrait.

The second is the way in which she disposed of Naboth. Hard by the grounds of the ivory palace in Jezreel, a poor man named Naboth owned a vineyard. It was well watered. Ahab coveted the poor man's ground for a vegetable garden, but Naboth was unwilling to part with the inheritance of his fathers. His refusal put the king in a bad humour. Ahab acted like a spoiled

child. He came into the house heavy and displeased, and laid him down on his bed, and turned his face to the wall, and would eat no bread. Jezebel finds her royal spouse in this unhappy condition, and says: "My dear, why is thy spirit so sad?" She must have cared for him. She could not respect him, but there are times when love seems able to survive the loss of respect. Ahab tells her of Naboth and his refusal. As she listened, Jezebel's eyes began to snap, and her Phœnician temperament prepared for action. "Dost thou now govern Israel?" she said to Ahab. "Arise, and I will give thee Naboth's piece of ground."

She usually did what she started out to do. That was what scared Elijah. If she cannot gain her ends by fair means, she will by foul. She forges letters in Ahab's name and sends them to the nobles in the city. She has Naboth arrested, and two sons of Belial bribed to testify that he was guilty of blaspheming God and the king. Conviction is easy. Naboth is carried out and stoned to death, and the royal mistress is informed that all difficulties have been removed. The rest was perfunctory. She soon had Ahab out of

bed. She says: "Naboth is out of the way. Confiscate his vineyard." Ahab did so. He always did what his wife told him to do. He arose and took possession. Jezebel was a woman with something of the tiger in her make-up. She did not hesitate to take what she wanted. She was Nordic. Paint that into her portrait.

The third incident was when she attempted to vamp Jehu. Jezebel is now queen dowager. With a bow drawn at a venture, as if the invisible hand of God were bringing the weak and wicked king to judgment, Ahab had been shot to death. Jezebel declined to be retired, and continued to cast her spell over the nation. Jehu has been anointed to rid the land of infamy. He is marching on Jezreel. Jezebel's son, Joram the king, rides out in his chariot to meet Jehu, and says: "Is it peace, Jehu?" Jehu answered: "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" That was rather plain language to use to a man about his mother, but Joram does not argue. He turns to flee, when Jehu draws his bow and sends an arrow through his heart. They took up Joram's dead body,

and cast it into the field of Naboth for a remembrance. The tables are turning.

But Jezebel is not dismayed. She learns what Jehu has done. What does she do? Does she prepare for flight? She does not even think of it. She prepares for action. She paints her face and tires her hair and looks out of the window. The lady was game. Does she not know men? She will attack the foe from the rear. She will treat Jehu as Delilah treated Samson. She will tempt him to terms, with her painted face and tired hair. Some think she was merely preparing for a royal exit, but Jezebel's past hardly bears out such an interpretation. She had conquered too many men. She will try one more. This time she reckons without her host.

Jehu looked up and saw the painted face at the window, and cried: "Who is on my side, who?" Two eunuchs, seeing that the tide had turned, looked out, and Jehu said: "Throw her down," and down through dizzy space they hurled the body of the woman whose spirit declined to surrender. Jezebel was dashed to death on the pavement below, and her blood sprinkled the wall and

the horses, and they trod her under foot. Jezebel was invincible and unscrupulous. Her last play was to stake virtue in the hope that she might keep her crown. Paint that also into the portrait.

These are the three chapters in the life story of the queen of Jezreel. We wonder what such a woman might have accomplished had her fearless soul been mastered by a passion for the true and living God, and her heart mated with a man who matched her in strength and courage. As it was, the love trail which takes us across the threshold of the ivory palace at Jezreel, while lit up with the romance of hearts that were constant in their devotion to each other, leads to disappointment and ends in tragedy.

THE HOME LIFE IN THE PALACE

Jezebel was the head of the house. Longfellow wrote:

“As unto the bow the cord is,
So unto man is the woman,
Though she draws him, she obeys him,
Though she bends him, yet she follows.”

He was not writing of Jezebel.

Some one asked of a man who had died:

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"Did he leave a will?" "Yes," was the answer. "His wife survives him." The ideal union is when lives are so perfectly mated that the question of who rules is never raised. It is not much of a head of the house whose lordly authority rests on no firmer foundation than the word "obey" in the marriage service. The earthly Eden is a fragile paradise and its rose garden a near wilderness when husband and wife storm at each other over the question of authority. The man was doubtless meant to be the head of the house, but he must hold the reins by an inherent merit. Otherwise, Jezebel will wear the crown.

Ahab deserved what he got. He was yellow. He was merely an excuse for a man. How he played the baby in the matter of Naboth's vineyard! In her heart, Jezebel must have despised him. Ahab was mere putty in her hands. She did with him as she pleased, and treated him as an annex to the royal establishment. Had she mated with a real man, she might have been a better woman.

It is no easy thing to master a woman of her type. You hear men similarly situated



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sometimes giving utterance to sentiments of bravery and daring, but usually when they get at short range with the object of their concern, their courage dies. Shakespeare has suggested a method of taming the shrew. His remedy is for the man to play the same rôle. That may work well in literature, but there are men who have tried it out in real life, and who testify that literature and life are different.

JEZEBEL'S INFLUENCE IN THE NATION

More serious was this woman's influence over the nation. She cast a blight on Israel. She introduced the worship of Baal and Astarte, which was simply licentiousness veneered with religion. She had all the prophets of the Lord she could find slain. She had strength, but she was a bloody woman.

If, instead of going for his wife to a pagan nation and an alien faith, Ahab had married a devout woman from among the daughters of his own people, his reign would doubtless have been altogether different. He might not have been very different himself. He would still have been clay in the hands of

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the potter. But the clay would have been fashioned into a vessel of honour and not of dishonour.

History is replete with instances showing how powerfully national life has been influenced by women of strong personality. We think of Queen Elizabeth of England, who was something of a Jezebel herself. We think of Catherine de Medici of France, a woman of impious life and evil memory. On the side of virtue and religion, we think of the good Queen Victoria and her long and gentle reign. We think of how in girlhood she threw herself on God as she faced the responsibilities of the throne. We think of her answer to the Indian prince when he asked her the secret of England's greatness, and she pointed to the Bible. And it becomes increasingly evident that the women who make a happy home and exert a helpful influence in public life are women of piety whose natures are disciplined by the grace of God.

THE SWEETENING INFLUENCE OF RELIGION IN A WOMAN'S LIFE

Jezebel had so much that was fine, we are

disappointed that she was not finer. If only she had come under the spell of a faith that would have glorified and transformed her personality, she might have come down to us as one of the greatest women in these love stories of long ago. But she missed the best. She lacked the touch that transforms, and she survives rather as a warning to women who have great strength, brilliant gifts, daring initiative, magnetic personality, lofty station, but who must have more.

Jezebel was a woman with a sharp tongue. The tongue is an unruly member. It is set on fire of hell. It is responsible for much unhappiness. How different life would be if some things had never been said! Why should they ever have been said? What earthly good came from saying them? They only gratified an ugly mood which became more savage by being expressed, and which excited a mood like itself in others. If we could but remember to practice the Scripture which says: "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger," life would be happier for ourselves and others.

She was a woman with a violent and un-

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governable temper. This was the explanation of her sharp tongue. She had never learned to control herself, and in her violent moods, raged with a lack of self-control that approached insanity. Indeed, sometimes an ungovernable temper seems to be a form of temporary madness. The usual restraints of reason and conscience are swept aside. The will is at the mercy of the passions, and conduct becomes the folly of fools. This is not a plea for absence of temper, for a clay nature that never burns with righteous wrath nor flames with holy indignation. It is possible to be angry and sin not. But one should be master of himself.

Jezebel was unscrupulous. We are digging deeper into the wreckage of a great life here. She lacked a sense of honour. She got what she wanted. If forgery and bribery and murder were the only tools to secure her ends, she used them. The absence of honour is the ultimate disgrace. "I should rather my boy would drink than lie," a father said to me. "If he drinks, there is some hope of his reformation, but a lie would seem to be the despair of God Himself." When woman, who is supposed to inspire honour

and all the noble traits which fraternize with it, becomes herself the betrayer and destroyer of honour, the depths of infamy have been reached.

She was a woman with a powerful personality and unquestioned ability, but whose life had never been harnessed to a great conviction. If only something splendid could have captured and enlisted her, what a different woman she might have been! She had tremendous possibilities for both good and evil, but because her life had no contact with God, she failed. In a conspicuous way she represents her sex. Womanhood has vast possibilities for both good and evil. She can bless or curse. If she lends herself to a life of piety and service, she can bring Eden back to earth. But the women who play for money, whose brains are fuddled with drink, who toy with virtue and gamble with the sanctities of life, are not likely to find much of an Eden here or hereafter.

"Notwithstanding, I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel," is a line we find in the last book of the Bible. The name of the wicked queen survives as a term of reproach.

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Happy the age and land blessed with women whose names shall survive as the fragrance of an ineffable remembrance! Like the women of whom Paul thought when he wrote to Timothy and said: "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice!" America needs for these days in which we live women who get their inspiration at the altar of a true faith. There is nothing she needs more.

XI

THE SHULAMITE

A Lily Among Thorns

"As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters."—CANTICLES 2: 2.



THE Song of Songs is like a painting made by one of the old masters. It was written nobody knows how many hundreds or thousands of years ago, but its theme is as recent as yesterday. It is the story of two lovers. It is the romance of a mountain girl whose heart was constant and who amid all the bewilderments and enticements of a gay and gaudy and evil court did not forget and could not be happy separated from her shepherd lover in the hills. The book is a dramatic presentation of pure marital love. A stage for the play may be found in any garden where roses bloom, on any night when the silvery moon is shining, at any doorstep where two sit with no curious ears to listen and no prying eyes to break the spell of nesting hearts.

The song is written in limpid verse, the

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beauty of whose imagery and the charm of whose diction have rarely been equalled. The love of one man and one woman for each other is unfolded in the five acts of the inspired play. Each act is divided into scenes; interspersed are music and singing, chorus girls and dancing, ardent speeches and dreamy reveries. There are tense moments of blinding temptation and seasons of desperate struggle when a soul sore pressed must fight for its life. There are nights of longing and loneliness, and hours when pomp and pleasure dazzle. Then at the end there is a girl who has come by a long journey and who waits in a glen of the North Country for a lover who has met her there before and for whom her heart cries as she calls:

“ Make haste, my beloved,
And be thou like to a roe or to a young hart,
Upon the mountain of spices.”

I have likened this story to a painting by one of the old masters. Sometimes one of these priceless old pictures is found painted over by a later and cheaper hand. Some one discovers the trick, and carefully removing the veneer of paint reveals the masterpiece.

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The Song of Songs has suffered at the hands of superficial interpreters. It has been regarded as an allegory. The Jews found in this book an outline of their nation's history. Christian students have looked upon Solomon as a type of Christ and the Shulamite as representing the Church. It was all so crude that some have wondered why such a book as the Song of Songs should be in the Bible at all. Modern criticism has gone through the veneer, and found the original to be a matchless love song, breathing a lofty ethical motive, and enshrining the romance of two hearts whose love trail leads to a new Eden.

THE STORY

The Shulamite was a peasant girl from the hill country of Northern Palestine. Her unusual and extraordinary beauty caught the eye of King Solomon, who decided to add her to his harem. Soon his Majesty is wildly in love with the maid, and by every art and device and plea he can summon he seeks to win her heart. The ladies of the court attempt to further the wooings of the love-mad king by reciting the splendours of the palace,

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the glories of the royal bounty, and the personal charms of King Solomon himself.

The Shulamite, however, has a sweetheart to whom she has plighted her troth, and all the seductive proposals of the king and his courtiers cannot move her. Despite the gay life of the court she is lonely and homesick for her beloved. Repeatedly the king attempts to win her, but each time she repulses him and sings of her mountain sweetheart, until at last they let her go. Then like some wild thing escaped from the snare of the fowler she spreads her wings for home. The curtain falls on the girl and her shepherd lover reunited in their haven in the hills.

Such is the story, and in language whose grace and charm have never been surpassed, it is recited in the Song of Songs. Let us listen in on a line here and there as this royal rake who had, we are told, seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, attempts to break down the resistance of a simple-hearted girl whose purity and constancy were more than a match for the old lecher.

In his first attempt at wooing, the chorus girls open the way. They are singing to the Shulamite. They would turn her head with

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flattery. "Rightly do they love thee," they sing.

Then with blunt and unaffected honesty she replies: "I am black, but comely,—I am swarthy, because the sun hath scorched me. They made me keeper of the vineyard."

The chorus girls reply: "Oh, thou fairest among women!"

They seem to say: "Don't mention your complexion. It is perfect."

Just here his Royal Highness enters, and lifting the maid's hand to his lips he says:

"As a lily among thorns,
So is my love among the daughters."

The Shulamite replies:

"As the apple tree among the trees of the wood
So is my beloved among the sun."

She is telling the king about her absent lover. It must have spoiled the day for Solomon.

But he is not easily discouraged, and tries again and again as the weeks go by.

The girl recalls happy scenes when she was with her lover in the hills. She falls asleep and dreams. He is seeking her.

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“ Behold, he standeth behind our wall,
He looketh in at the windows,
He showeth himself through the lattice,
My beloved spake and said unto me,
‘ Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away.’ ”

She escapes from the palace and wanders through the city seeking him, but she cannot find him. She returns crying: “ I sought him, but I found him not.”

And now Solomon prepares to renew his suit on a grander scale. The chorus girls have performed again. They are followed by citizens who in brief speeches declaim the virtues of their royal master. At the psychological moment the king enters and says to the Shulamite:

“ Behold, thou art fair, my love,
Behold, thou art fair,
Thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil.”

I can imagine a scared look in her innocent eyes as she answers:

“ I will get me to the mountain of myrrh,
And to the hill of frankincense.”

Again he woos her, but with no better fortune, until finally they give her her liberty.

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The palace is behind her now, and all the empty show, the bizarre splendours, the painted faces, and that evil face she fears most. She has left them behind. She is thinking of Lebanon, the hills are calling. She seems to hear her lover's voice. It is a wild song of the heart he sings:

“Come with me from Lebanon, my bride,
Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride,
Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes,
With one chain of thy neck,
How fair is thy love, my sister, my bride.”

And now she is singing to him. Soon his arms will be around her. Soon her head will be on his shoulder. It will be the lily among thorns no longer, but the lily in the garden of love.

“Awake, O, north wind, and come thou south,
Blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may
flow out,
Let my beloved come into his garden,
And eat his precious fruits.”

Her lover answers:

“I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride.”

They are together again. They build their

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little Eden in the hill. There is no royal court, no gorgeous palace, no dazzling retinues, no ladies-in-waiting, no feasting and dancing. But somehow she does not miss them. She has something better. It is the man she loves. Together they build their home. It is a modest house, but the heart sings, and the eyes shine, and the flowers are blooming on the path that leads to the door, and yonder on the hillside her shepherd lover feeds his flock. Sometimes she is by his side, sometimes in the vineyard, where her red lips and brown arms are still scorched by the caresses of the too-near Orient sun. They do their work together, and when it is evening they sit out under the eastern stars and she says, not in her dreams now: "My beloved is mine, and I am his."

THE WORLD MUST NOT FORGET

The picture which looks down from this old-time love story is one the world must never forget. There is a holding, steadying, keeping power in the sanctity of marriage love. When the lily is among the thorns, when youth is caught in the mad swirl of currents, gay but dissolute, when a man or

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a woman faces the seductions of a serpent as ancient as the lost Paradise, as modern as sin, and as dangerous as hell, nothing so holds life to a safe course as a pure love. Alas for the lily that lays its cheek against the thorn! Woe to the husband or wife faithless to that vow which must never know doubt nor change! Shame on youth when love is stained with lust, and the devotion of a true heart bartered for a mess of pottage!

Solomon's chorus girls are still singing, and their songs are not always for clean hearts to hear. The programs put on in that royal roué's harem have long since been relegated to the gallery of prudes. In modern life there is no longer any reserve; nothing shocks us. Silly heads whose brains have addled think only in terms of money and titles and the cabaret. Social climbers are ready to sell happiness and honour for a smile of royalty. The world is full of disappointed people who discover too late that neither respectability nor happiness travels on the train they have taken. Love holds the only key, and when it comes to that altar God built on the wreck of Eden, there is but one face that makes the picture. It is the face

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whose image is in the heart. When that face fades, the whole world goes dark.

There are some old-fashioned things on which we cannot improve. Marital love is the best of them. To-day they are digging relics out of long-forgotten graves at Ur of the Chaldees, where Abraham tarried on his way to the Land of Promise. These relics carry us back to a civilization antedating by three thousand years the birth of Christ. The pottery found is crude, not because art was lacking, but because the people of that day used silver and gold instead of clay for their vessels. Wonderful articles of solid gold tooled into faultless form have been brought to light. The love enshrined in the Song of Songs is old-fashioned, but it is like these precious metals of pure gold. Marital love is as old as the first morning of the world, and its winding trail has crossed the doorstep of every happy home since time began.

This story of the Shulamite pleads for chastity, for the sanctity of the relations God has ordained between the sexes. There are those to-day who are making light of these relations. They tell us there are no moralities involved, that sex is natural, and mar-

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riage a mere matter of convenience. They say that the vows taken at the marriage altar are elastic, and that one may take what he wants when he wants it. Shame on such lecherous drivell! Out upon such a swine's creed for life! Chastity is to love what holiness is to heaven.

Hang this picture of the Shulamite on the wall when you think of divorce. It was a protest against polygamy in a day when polygamy was common. It is common still, only we call it by a different name. We call it trial marriage, tandem marriage, which means consecutive polygamy.

The increase in divorce is becoming notorious. In 1922 there was one divorce to every seven marriages in the United States. The percentages are closer now. During the decade preceding 1886, there were two hundred thousand divorces; 1896, three hundred and fifty thousand; 1906, six hundred thousand; and 1916, one million. Nearly two million un-fathered or un-mothered children have thus been released on society. You cannot build an enduring nation upon such a social swamp.

What is the trouble? Marriage has be-

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come loveless. People marry for money, for convenience, for position. Scheming parents seek a match for their offspring rather than a union. One great reason why divorce has become so common is that the path to the marriage altar has ceased to be a love trail.

The chaste romance of this girl from the hills is something to remember after marriage as well as before. It becomes a dull world when the romantic beat dies out of our blood. Of course much in the long climb of the hill is prosaic, but we must not forget the rosy-tinted morning when we started to climb the hill together, and the low roof beneath which we first nested. The rose-bush still blooms, and it calls to lovers with a fragrance as compelling as when the world was young. The moonlight is as mellow. The doorstep is still just wide enough for two, and no one will see if you hold hands, and no one will do more than thank God for love, should lips that have lost none of their sweetness through the passing years say again: "My beloved is mine and I am his!"

XII

MARY

The Love Trail by the Empty Tomb

"Supposing him to be the gardener."—JOHN 20: 15.



WOMAN is sobbing in a garden, with heaven next door; but her eyes are too full of tears, and her mind is too full of fears for her to see her joy.

✓ She is a woman with a story. She is Mary Magdalene, out of whom Christ had cast seven devils. She had suffered from this mysterious and malign spiritual disease in its most aggravated form. The preternatural frenzy, the divided consciousness, the long continued silence, the succeeding mental depression and despair had made her lot one of unalleviated misery.

✓ She was also a woman with an experience. One day she met the Great Healer, and He gave her spirit its emancipation. The devils were cast out. Her mind was healed and the

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world became new. There was no happier woman in all the land than Mary as she went about ministering to Him Who had taken her soul out of hell.

She was also a woman with a tragedy. She had lost her Master and Friend. The cross had cast its cruel shadow between them. They had taken down His bruised body and lovingly laid it to rest in the tomb, and now all that Mary had left of her heaven is a grave.

This is the woman who is sobbing there in the garden over a dead Christ. In the gray dawn she had slipped out to His tomb to find His body gone. As she peered down into the sepulchre, two angels in white had said to her: "Woman, why weepest thou?". Her reply was: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Then turning round, she saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. She saw her Master and Lord. She saw Him Who had healed her, Who had brought heaven down to her troubled heart. She saw Him, but knew not that it was Jesus. Then Jesus speaks to her. "Why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou?" Why does she not recog-

nize Him? He is not dead. He is risen. He is there before her eyes. The very hand that had touched her maimed life and set her free is lifted as though in blessing. "Woman, why weepest thou?" But she, supposing Him to be the gardener, said: "Sir, if ye have borne him hence, tell me where ye have laid him that I may come and take him away."

A woman is sobbing in a garden, with heaven next door; but her eyes are too full of tears, and her mind is too full of fears for her to discover her joy.

THE PARALYSIS OF DOUBT

The first thing in the story is the paralysis of doubt. For the moment the woman has lost her bearings. The events of the past three days have staggered, bewildered and confused her. Her faculties are benumbed. Doubts have come to torment her. Why should He Who raised the dead Himself die? She cannot shake off the spell which doubt casts on her soul, and its paralysis is so great that she mistakes the risen Christ for the gardener.

Seasons of doubt come to the best. The

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fact that your faith is clear-eyed and steady to-day is no sign that the storm may not break to-morrow. Sometimes doubts steal into holiest moments of fellowship, or follow in the wake of most exalted seasons of spiritual privilege. While we read the Bible, while we pray, in the hour of worship, like a black shadow, doubt drifts in and challenges faith.

Do not surrender. Doubt may seem to make faith foolish for the moment, but cling to your faith. Doubt is not an achievement. It is an infirmity. It requires no ability to deny, to question, to utter a negation. It is not negations, but positions, that demand ability. It is not doubt, but faith, that is an evidence of mental vigour. Doubt is not the soul in action. It is the soul in a state of paralysis. Its powers have ceased to function. We move out, not along the line of our doubts, but of our faiths. The people who achieve are the people who believe. And so do not take doubts too seriously. Of course one must not mistake credulity for faith. There is no virtue in believing a lie. It does not make a lie the truth. It is not necessary to degrade the mind in order to exalt the heart. We are to have a reason for the faith

that is in us, but we must have faith, for without faith it is not only impossible to please God, it is impossible even to find Him.

But God is, whether one have faith or not. The fact that one does not see Him does not reduce God to a myth. Doubts do not abolish the Deity. They only pull down the curtain on the sun, and leave the soul in darkness. But there are those who see Him, and the positive affirmation of one clear-eyed soul is worth more than a million negations from those whose spiritual vision has gone blind under the paralysis of doubt. "Supposing him to be the gardener." That did not make Him the gardener. He was the glorious risen Christ, whatever Mary supposed Him to be. The reality of God is not affected by doubts. He is there in all His glory and power. All that doubt does is to blind us, to lame us, to paralyze the lordliest part of our being so that it cannot function, until, when one sees God in His world, he supposes Him to be a natural law, or a chemical formula, or a tradition, or a trick of chance or fate, or a fear of the feeble-minded.

Doubts come, but do not coddle them, do

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not brag about them. They are nothing to be proud of. Shame them, starve them out, fight your doubts, fight for your faith. Keep on believing, for the size of a man's soul is not the size of his doubts, but the size of his faiths.

THE STUPOR OF GRIEF

The second thing in the story is the stupor of grief. A woman is sobbing. She is obsessed with her sense of loss. She can think of nothing but the dead Christ. She has been trying to comfort herself with the sight of His body taken from the cross. But now even that poor comfort is gone, and her tears flow afresh. Stupefied and bewildered by grief, she sees Jesus, but does not recognize Him.

It is not strange that grief should cast a stupor on the soul. Who that has had a great sorrow but has felt its deadening effect? We are not able easily to readjust ourselves. It is hard to think clearly. Strange moods settle down upon us. In vain do we try to shake them off.

It is a dangerous thing to surrender to this stupor. It means an unhealthy yielding to

introspection, which is a reversal of life's machinery and sets the mind grinding in on itself. Under the influence of the stupor of grief the will lies inert. Life's perspective gets topsy-turvy. We grow morbid and melancholy and unreasonable. We resent as an intrusion anything which would interfere with the hallowed enjoyment of our bereavement. We come to regard the indulgence of our grief as a sacrament, and a visit to the grave as nothing less than a religious pilgrimage.

As a result, we find ourselves under the stupor of grief making the same mistake Mary made in the garden, looking our blessings full in the face, and treating them as matters of no importance. "Supposing him to be the gardener." Has grief ever done that for us? Has sorrow for the dead made us forget the living? Has a grave so absorbed us that we have failed to thank God for those left? I would not chide you, for "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." A voice is calling us, as Jesus called Mary that morning in the garden. "Why weepest thou?" Despite tears and fears, heaven is still next door if we will only look up.

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THE AWAKENING OF LOVE

The next thing is the awakening of love. "Mary!" That is all He said. But He said it with the old accent, with His heart on His lips, as He had said it so often in the old days which she thought had gone forever, as He said it the day He set her free, as He said it during the hours she ministered to Him. "Mary!" She turned and said unto Him: "Teacher!"

Love is the great awakener,—not fear, not force, not scorn nor hate, but love. Love releases life for action. Love puts us at our best. It rings the bells until even the dead hear the call and rise from their graves.

Love is the alchemy for the paralysis of doubt. You will never kill doubt with reason. There is nothing more futile than to argue with a mind hostile to God. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God. They are foolishness to him. Neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." Religious truth is a revelation, a discovery. It comes with the light, and light steals into the soul through experience. Hence the medicine for doubt is

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not a head but a heart process. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Be patient, be kind, be tolerant, and doubt will release its paralyzing grip and the soul will be free.

Love is also the remedy for the stupor of grief. Broken wings must be healed with love. The dead heart must be awakened by love. It is amazing what love can do. Are there prophecies? They shall fail. Are there tongues? They shall cease. Is there knowledge? It shall vanish away. But now abideth faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love. "Supposing him to be the gardener." "Mary!" Thank God for the love tones of life! He is speaking to us to-day. Are we sobbing in a garden? He is calling our name with the old accent. Oh, that we might see Him, that the veil might fall from our eyes and the burden from our weary heart with the discovery that it is not night, but morning, not a tomb, but a garden, not a dead Christ, but the risen Lord Who calls us!

THE MAJESTY OF THE SPIRIT

The next thing in the story is the majesty

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of the spirit. "Touch me not!" She is clinging to Him. She is doing what every woman would have done. The instant she discovered that Jesus had come back, she stretches out her arms. She catches at His garment. She would hold Him forever. But Jesus gently disengages her hands and says: "You must not cling to me. I am not yet ascended. I am not a body, but an eternal spirit. I am not what your eyes see and your hands touch, but what your faith apprehends."

It is a slow lesson for some to learn, this lesson that life is not flesh, but spirit; not what we see, but believe; not what we touch, but worship; that the soul is not a clod of dust, but a spark of immortality. The body is but the house we live in for a little while. I am not my body. I am living outside of it constantly, thinking thoughts, projecting plans, and enjoying sensations which the body cannot measure. Man lies soaking in a spiritual atmosphere, and in that atmosphere is to be found reality.

Hence death is nothing to fear. It is nothing seriously to lament when one understands it aright. Death is a chapter of life. It is

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lifting the curtain on a new world. What we need is not to get back our dead, but to discover that there is no death.

“Cease clinging to me!” Do not make a grave your shrine. Do not think that little vase of withered flowers is all there is in God’s garden.

“It all comes back, the odour, grace and hue,
Each sweet relation of its life repeated,
Nothing is lost, no looking for is cheated,
It is the thing we knew.”

Life is one, and life is not carnal, it is spiritual.

THE SANCTITY OF SERVICE

The curtain falls on this story of a risen Christ and a sobbing woman in a garden with the sanctity of service. The paralysis of doubt, the stupor of grief, the awakening of love, the majesty of the spirit, and at the top of the trail the sanctity of service. “Go!” That was the way to heaven. I can see her as she went. I think she ran. Had she wings, she would love to fly. The tears are gone, and all her fears. Her soul is in her face, and it is shining. She cries her mes-

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sage into the wondering ears of the disciples, for she cannot wait to reach them. "He is risen!" "Christ is risen. I have seen Him. He has talked with me. I have touched the living Lord."

"Go tell my disciples!" Christ gives us something to do, and as we do it we find heaven. It may be a simple thing He gives us, just a message for other hearts that are lonely, just a bit of loving service, a ministry to the sick, a kindness to a child, a visit, a word, some humble task about the home, but something that takes us outside of ourselves, that breaks up introspection, that stirs us from the stupor of grief, that ends our vigil at the grave, and sends us out, not to the dead, but to the living.

Are we groping in some fog-bank of doubt, with the splendid possibilities of a life of usefulness in a state of paralysis? Christ says: "Go!" Do something for somebody, and doubt will die. Are we in the stupor of grief, with our very soul drugged into a state where reason has well-nigh ceased to function? Get up from the grave and go on some errand of loving service.

There is nothing holier than service. Any

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doubt that would step in between us and service to others deceives. Any grief that would hold us back forfeits its claim. Service is the road to heaven. "Supposing him to be the gardener." Is there another woman sobbing in a garden, with heaven next door; but her eyes so full of tears, and her mind so full of fears that she cannot see her joy? Across the lips of the risen Christ the needy world still voices its message: "Go!" Go out and help some one. Go into all the world and preach the Gospel. Forget yourself. Lose yourself in the life of the world. Go, and as you obey, it will not be the gardener, but the living Christ Himself Who is "with you alway, even unto the end."

XIII

THE LOVE TRAIL OF THE NAIL-PIERCED FEET

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."—I JOHN 4: 10.



COME with me as these picture stories come to the closing chapter along the love trail worn and hallowed by the nail-pierced feet of the Son of God. It is a long and winding trail, for it started before time began, and it winds and widens until it reaches all peoples and all worlds.

No one can follow Jesus far, nor listen to Him long, nor study ever so superficially the teachings of the New Testament without reaching the conclusion that the dominant note of Christianity is love,—not hate but love, not law but love, not fear but love, not zeal but love, not force but love, not knowledge but love, not morality but love, not holiness but love, not victory but love, not service but love. To be sure, it is a religion

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that touches every chord, and that sweeps all the moods of the redeemed life; but the melody which runs through everything is the music of love. Christianity is first and foremost and always not a fear religion, not a force religion, not a ritual religion, not a dogma religion, not a mystery religion, not a culture religion, but the religion of love.

Love was the soul and substance of Christ's teaching. When they asked Him what God is, He said: "God is love." When they asked Him what God looks like, He painted the features of fatherhood into the picture. When they asked Him why He came, He told them that He came because God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. When they asked Him how they should live, He told them to love one another. When they asked Him about law, He told them that love is the fulfilling of the law. When they asked Him about the Sabbath, He smashed the rules of legalism and said the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. When they urged Him to call down fire from heaven on His enemies, He went to another

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village and taught them to love their enemies. When they asked Him to condemn sinners He forgave a harlot, went home to dinner with a publican, and opened the gate of heaven to a thief. When He talked to them about the prodigal He showed them the love-light on the road that leads to the Father's house. When they talked to Him about their fears and forebodings He said: "Perfect love casteth out fear."

Thus we might go on, turning page after page, traveling mile after mile, reciting story after story. And it is always the same story, the old, old story of love. Leave love out of the teachings of Jesus, and you have disfigured and mutilated His message beyond recognition.

I know there are good people who do not hold with these views. They believe in the terrors of the law. They clamour for a creed that flames with penalty. They have little confidence in the efficacy of a religion that keeps hell in the background. At a conference in which I had spoken on the love of God, a man in the audience came forward to tell me what he thought of the effort. He was the superintendent of a city mission.

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He worked with hardened criminals, drunkards, dope fiends, the lost of the underworld. He said: "Your sermon sounded fine, but that kind of preaching would not make a dent on my crowd. What they need is to be shaken over the edge of a fiery hell." Another day I was speaking on the conquest of fear. Before I went on the platform a minister said: "What is your subject this morning?" When I told him, he exclaimed: "Why the conquest of fear? What the world needs to-day is a big, healthy dose of fear. If the scoundrels are to quit their meanness, they must be scared, and scared stiff."

Recently I read an editorial in one of our denominational papers on "Stalwart Presbyterians." The editor paid a glowing tribute to the old dour, controversial type of Christian, and lamented the fact that these militant saints of a belligerent creed were being supplanted by pacifists and indifferentists who preached chiefly the love of God. Are these men right? Is it a religion of fear and fire and force that the world needs? If so, Jesus was wrong. He Who came to save the world lost His way. The nail-pierced

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feet which traveled the love trail that winds by Calvary's cross would best have halted on the bleak and barren sides of Mount Sinai.

There are Christians who live in the Old Testament. Moses was good enough for them. Jacob was good enough for them. David was good enough for them. Elijah and Elisha were good enough for them. Isaiah and Jeremiah and the fiery prophets were good enough for them. God forbid that I should do aught to dull or disturb the halo of these saints of God who in their day and generation contended earnestly for the faith once delivered! But the New Testament is an advance on the Old. It has all that was good in the Old, and more. Jesus had all that Moses had, and more. He had all that David had, and more. He had all that Isaiah and the prophets had, and more. He is not to be tested by them. They are to be tested by Him. The prophets were national. Jesus was international. They were concerned for the Jew, Jesus for humanity. They were reformers, Jesus was a Saviour. Their message was law, Christ's message was love.

Love is not such a little thing, such a weak

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and impotent thing, colourless, spineless, forceless. We have used the word so much and so lightly that it has lost its sublime accent for many of us. We think of it as a harmless sentiment, a synonym for indulgence, a license to sensuality, exemption from penalty. Some one says: "I love flowers; I love music; I love scenery; I love travel." A man says: "I love my dog; I love my horse." A boy says: "I love football." A girl says: "I love candy." And with something of the same flippancy people sometimes speak of the love of God.

What is love? Let us travel the trail of the nail-pierced feet for our answer. Before you taboo the love of God in your mission hall, stop before the cross long enough to hear Jesus say to a thief: "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise." Before you bank too much on fear as the commodity the world most needs, linger long enough in Jesus' presence to hear Him say to a wayward girl: "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more." Before you clamour too loud and too long for a return of the controversial stalwart, the intolerant dogmatist, kneel beside Simon Peter there on the shore of Galilee in

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the gray dawn of the early morning, and listen to Jesus as He says over and over again: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?"

Love is the great note in the religion of Jesus. When we get a vision of what love really is, we shall not despise it. Let us take the love trail of the nail-pierced feet. It can show us three great things about the love of the New Testament. The love Christ came to reveal is uncaused. It is unselfish. And it is unending.

UNCAUSED

It is uncaused,—that is, it was not caused, it was not produced, for it always existed. It is not our love to God, but His love to us. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us." Our love to God is unspeakably precious, but it is infinitesimal in comparison with His love to us. Christ came to tell us about the love of God, about how the great Father feels toward all His creatures, and He sums up His message in one word, and that word is love.

God loves us, not because of what we are, but because of what He is. His love, therefore, is not called forth by our merit or good-

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ness or obedience, or even by our need. It is there already, preëxistent, without the need of a cause to produce it. The idea is not that God will love us **provided** we behave ourselves, **provided** we are good and obedient children, **provided** we keep His commandments and do His holy will. He loves us regardless of whether we are good or bad. He has always loved us. His love precedes our being. It antedates the world. It is not the product of His foreknowledge. Love is as old as foreknowledge. It is as old as God Himself.

Hence, love is uncaused. God does not make love any more than the sun makes light. The sun *is* light, and God *is* love. God's love is timeless. He loved the world before the world had being. He sent His Son to be our Saviour. We did not send for Christ. Christ was sent to us. Redemption originated in heaven, in love. Calvary was always in the heart of God. Christ was slain from the foundation of the world.

God can no more stop loving us than He can stop being. It is a caricature to represent Him as subject to petty moods, annoyed by disobedience, elated by attention, flattered

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by praise. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. His love is the same. Love, therefore, is not only uncaused, but is itself the great first cause. It is back of everything else. It is not fear, nor force, nor hate, that furnishes voltage for the power plant of Omnipotence. It is love. Love is not made in heaven. Love makes heaven. Love is not an attribute of God. It is His essence. It is what He is, and always was, and will be forever.

UNSELFISH

The love of God is unselfish. That seems a little thing to say about so great a theme. It is not easy to find words with capacity big enough to hold our thoughts when God's love is the theme. His love does not count the cost. When one thinks of the resources at the disposal of Omnipotence, and keeps in mind that love taxes all of these, spends all it has, and refuses to count the cost, the unselfishness of God's love begins to dawn. Love is absorbed in its object. God suffers when those He loves suffer. He flames with righteous wrath when those He loves are wronged. There is no hate like the hate of

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love, no wrath like the anger of a loving God.

Calvary was the great unveiling of the unselfishness of God's love. Jesus did not spare Himself. He made Himself of no reputation. He emptied Himself of His Godhood. He endured the cross, and despised the shame, for His nail-pierced feet were on the love trail seeking to bring the lost world back to God.

Do you tell me there is nothing in the recital of such a love to lift the fallen, to reclaim the wanderer, to melt the heart of stone, to quicken the seared conscience and stir the dead soul with the pulses of a new life? Do you tell me that hell can cast a better spell than heaven, that the Pharisee is closer to God than the penitent? I cannot believe it. Let us not forget the old fable of the contest between the wind and the sun in their effort to make the traveler lay aside his cloak. Love is like the sun. Love suffereth long and is kind. Love vaunteth not itself.

This is where souls are born again,—at Calvary, in sight of the atoning love of a God Who does not spare Himself. The

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French have a story which they tell of a young American who went to Paris to study art. While there, he fell under the influence of an evil woman. His mother, with that infallible intuition of motherhood, sensing that there was something wrong with her son, went over to Paris to be with him. Discovering the situation, she endeavoured to free him from the influence of this vampire. The woman became enraged because of this interference, and demanded that her lover break with his mother. Finally she said: "If you are to have me, you must bring me your mother's heart." He killed his mother, cut out her heart, and was on his way with it to pay his paramour the price when he slipped and fell on the pavement. As he did so, his mother's heart fell and rolled into the street. As it struck the pavement, the young man heard his mother's voice say: "My son, are you hurt?" The French have given this story an American setting, whether because of the perfidy of the son or the devotion of the mother I do not know. But I do know there are American mothers whose love is as unselfish as this story describes. But greater than the love of any American mother, and

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more unselfish, is the love of God. God is thinking of His children. He is asking: "Are you hurt?" No matter what you have done, how you have treated Him, listen. It is the heart of God speaking. "Son, daughter, are you hurt?" Let Him heal you, and love you, and lead you home.

UNENDING

God's love is unending. I cannot conceive of a mother ever ceasing to love her children. No matter what happens, no matter how they have treated her, no matter where she goes, whether in life or in death, whether in this world or in some other world, as long as she has being, love lives. I cannot conceive of God's love coming to an end. If His love be uncaused, it is as old as God, if unending, it will live as long as God. It is eternal.

That is, no matter who you are, where you go, what world you inhabit, what career you adventure, God will still be loving you. He takes back nothing. All that He ever offered He still offers. All that He ever said He says. He does not change. His love is unending.

Perhaps you are asking: Does this mean a

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second chance after death for the finally impenitent? No. It means that the first chance is eternal. Love never closes the door. When the gate is shut, it is shut from the outside. It means that if you are ever eternally bankrupt, it will not be because God has foreclosed. It will be because you have hardened yourself against Him until you are past feeling.

Richard Cadbury was once thrown with Cardinal Newman in a meeting. The Cardinal had spoken to the prisoners, and in his remarks had insisted that salvation was to be found only in the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church. At the close of the meeting, as he told Mr. Cadbury good-bye, he laid his hand on his head and blessed him. Mr. Cadbury, somewhat surprised, expressed his wonder that after such an address he should give him his blessing. Cardinal Newman said: "Richard, God will find the means of saving you." And so He will. God will find the means. He has resources larger than those packed into our little creed.

God's love is uncaused. It is unselfish. And it is unending. It is changeless, timeless, eternal, wider than all worlds, older

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than all years, higher than all heights, deeper than all depths, longer than all the spans of time, sweeter than all music, kinder than all tears, stronger than death, holier than heaven. Along its path He comes Whose feet were pierced with nails for you. Shall we go with Him to the house of love? How can we resist? "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

"O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I cannot close my heart to Thee."

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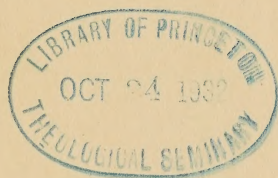
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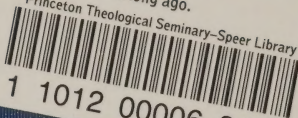
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