

W O M E N

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

A SERIES OF PORTRAITS.

With Characteristic Descriptions,

BY SEVERAL AMERICAN CLERGYMEN.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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Miriam

M I R I A M .

BY THE REV. CHARLES WADSWORTH.

WERE the letter-press of this volume to be philosophic, we should seek in the outward life of these women of the two Testaments, the finest exemplifications of the peculiar spirit of each successive dispensation of the Church. This gallery of Scripture portraits is really, to a philosophic eye, a gallery of exquisite transparencies, wherein, as the spiritual light kindles behind them, are seen in finest contrast, the peculiarities of the progressive religious economies. Miriam, as here sketched by the artist, the queenly prophetess of Israel, the exulting leader of the choral anthems of Israel's women, is a very incarnation of the magnificently stern spirit of the Old Hebrew Faith. The Gospel could have produced no such woman; nay, the Gospel compels us to look almost with recoil, upon the picture of a woman, going exultingly forth with timbrel and dance along the shore of a sea, tossing its great waves, even then, above a kingdom's gigantic desolation. And yet, in all this we see nothing more than woman's gentle nature giving distinctly forth in life, the power of the old Patriarchal Theism. Miriam, standing so proudly up by that bright sea, a burning prophetess exulting in the triumph of her God, must be judged, not by the gentler precepts of our faith, but by the moral canons of an anterior dispensation. And thus judged, I know no

style of human character worthy, on the whole, to be matched with that of a true prophetess of Israel. A woman's gentle nature wrought powerfully on by the dread afflatus of prophecy! A woman's gentle eye with its seer's glance piercing Eternity! A woman's gentle voice burdened with the mysteries of sublimest revelations. A woman's gentle soul rapt into incomprehensible and awful converse with the Infinite—the Eternal!

But the design of this volume is not so much philosophic as biographical; and the portrait introducing this article is suggestive not so much of continuous biography as of dramatic description; and attempting therefore no connected narrative of Miriam's life, it is only with its two passages, most picturesque and dramatic, we would at present concern ourselves. The first is the vigil by the banks of the Nile. The second is the victory on the Red Sea's shore.

MIRIAM IN HER TRIAL.

It is morning upon the proud, old realm of the Egyptian, the stars have gone out in the sky, and the dim day-spring hath waxed radiant to the zenith, and arching the broad landscape with its cloudless blue, the firmament pours down its rosy light upon scenes most discordantly mingled.

Morning upon the great city of Pharaoh, and gloriously over the marbled palaces, and softly through the voluptuous pavilions, and sparkingly upon golden throne and gemmed diadem of the despot king, blazes the first fiery sunshine.

Morning upon the low roof of the menial Hebrew, and full upon the rude board, and the coarse garb, and the toilworn and sorrowful brow of the child of God, as if in mockery of a stricken and suffering heart, blazes that golden sunshine.

Morning upon the banks of the Nile, and mighty as an enchantment waking the birds into song, and warming into aroma the dewy flowers, and making each rippling wave of the stream radiant as the boss of a silver shield, flashes the same burning sunshine.

Now, note we the picture well. On yon low point of the great river, amid the luxuriant rushes that line its shore, as if haply lodged by the refluxing wave, the little ark of the Levite is resting. And here, away on the high point where the clustering palms grow thick, with her little hands clasped close to her throbbing breast and her tearful eye fast on the bed of the beloved babe, the Hebrew girl stands watching. Alas for her sorrowful and most troubled watch ! The night air hath been damp and chill on her tender frame, and the monsters of the Nile have broken the waters at her feet in their wild play, and the forsaken babe hath sent forth at times from its low bed a desolate cry ; and yet, there since the midnight, true to the wont of her loving heart, hath she stood in her lonely watch, weak, fearful, forsaken. And this is her Trial.

Now turn we to the other and the contrasted scene :

MIRIAM IN HER TRIUMPH.

It is morning once more upon the Egyptian's land ; and again radiantly upon the pinnacles of the great city, and mockingly upon the desolate dwellings of the Hebrew, are sparkling the morn's first sunbeams.

We stand now with our artist on the shore of the Sea, at the hour of Israel's triumph over the Egyptian. At the midnight watch, there were sounds on the air, as of chariot, and rushing horse, and marching men in their mighty mail ; and the Host of the Hebrew fled fast in fear from the swarming thousands of Pharaoh. But with the

morning's light rose Jehovah's voice on the waters ; and as the wreck of a great kingdom, the plumes and the banners, and the shattered chariots, and the breathless horses of war, and all the champions of Egypt in their brave array, have gone down before the strong breath of the Eternal ! And now, by the exulting Sea which mingles its great voice with Israel's victorious anthem, Behold ! with her bosom swelling, and her eye afire, and her voice ringing out like a trumpet peal to the sky, in its chant of magnificent hallelujah, she stands again in the morning light, Miriam the prophetess of God. And this is her Triumph.

Now these are the two prominent, yet strangely contrasted, scenes in the life of Miriam. And turning from the picturesque to the practical, let us gather a few points of instruction involved in these passages. And,

First. *What a lesson herein, of encouragement to faith.* We have here, in most dramatic power, faith's ventures and faith's victory. The whole transaction on the Nile, with the infant Moses, we find ascribed in the Epistle to the Hebrews, to the power of faith. It was a mother's faith, that platted the rushes and launched the babe upon the waters. It was a sister's faith that kept watch through the midnight by that wild stream. And it is altogether beyond me to conceive of faith's more masterful trial. By all philosophic likelihoods does the child Moses seem hemmed in unto destruction. Surrounded every where by death ; death on the rushing stream, death at the fangs of Nile's monsters, death at the hands of the armed watchmen of Pharaoh. Ah, how can that weeping babe carry it victoriously over that despot king ! And how can God's promise written so clearly out on the brow of the child, "fair unto God," be fulfilled, in the face of so terrible an antagonism ! And yet, unmoved by it all, observe how the eye of the watching sister flashes through

her tears in serene trust ; and all the thronging interests of the hour are cast steadfastly upon God in faith's great ventures.

Now look we to faith's victory—the shore of the great Sea. And there with his sceptre broken, and his legions scattered, and all his kingly array, plumes of light, and chariots of battle, and banners of victory, tossing wild on the wave, Pharaoh the oppressor of Israel hath gone down to his doom. But the child Moses, whose outcast bed was by the rushes, sprung now to majestic manhood, Behold ! in his strength, in his glory, a conqueror of conquerors ! A victor beyond all the dreams of old chivalry, he walketh the Sea's shore matchlessly triumphant ! And Miriam ! no longer the weeping watcher, the tried, the trustful ; but Miriam the victoress ! Miriam the prophetess of God ! Behold how with her queenly tread, and her blazing eye, and her exulting voice, she leads the triumphs of Israel, sending up to the bending heavens, God's great hallelujah ! Faith's ventures so glorious in victory !

And surely then, these pictures, so striking in contrast, should strengthen Christian faith into mastery ; for they set forth alike the fact and the philosophic wisdom of Faith's great ventures : and in their study I perceive how Christian trust is, after all, but the perfection of reason. The light in that sister's eye through the lonely watch, is no blaze of fanaticism ; it springs only from that eagle vision of faith which rests ever on the great Power moving the springs of the universe. She has read God's preserving purpose in the unearthly beauty of that slumbering child ; and why should she fear the rushing flood, or the roaring monsters, or the menials of the princess's train, or the armed war-men of Pharaoh ! Why should she not rather, in all the joy of assured faith, go on from the ventures by the Nile, to the Red Sea's victory !

And so should it be ever. Christian faith, even in its wildest

trust, is philosophic ever. It arises from the look of an eye piercing beneath outward aspects, to those hidden springs that move the great universe ; and seeing God in them all, confides without fear that their working together shall be in fulfilment of His promises. And such being faith's ventures, its victories are certain. No matter for the strength of the antagonism or the aspects of discouragement, it is but taking God at his word ; it is but adjusting the wheel of human hope to play into the great machinery of Divine purposes ; it is but casting the anchor forth on the Eternal Rock, confident that the shattered bark will outride the hurricane ; it is but watching with Miriam God's great hand on the Nile, and then chanting God's victories by the Red Sea's billows.

Secondly. But then if thus manifestly an encouragement to faith, *there is taught here, no less manifestly, a great lesson of encouragement to activity.*

Faith, even when venturing on God's promise and purpose, is at best an infatuation, if it consist not with diligent pains-taking. Herein lie the differences between presumption and faith. The one sitteth with means unused, waiting for miracles ; the other worketh to the full in its own strength ere it look for interferences. Presumption would leave the child Moses in the Levite's home, trusting God to protect it ; Faith will conceal carefully, and plat cunningly the rushes, and launch tenderly upon the wave. Presumption would yield the child Moses to the rushing flood unwatched by the mortal ; Faith will set the sister's eye to keep sleepless vigil, as earnestly as if there were resting on him no glance of Omniscience. There must be to the uttermost, the mother's work and the sister's watch, ere there be looked for at all, an interposal of the watch and work of the Eternal. And so is it ever. Away from a Christian's creed the pitiful tenet, that because God works man may be idle.

If these contrasted pictures exhibit faith's victory, they exhibit as well, the victory of well doing. The scene on the Red Sea's shore, is but a philosophic consequent of the scene on Egyptian River. Had not Miriam watched earnestly, she had not triumphed ultimately ; though there be through all the intervening record, the manifestation of God's marvellous working, yet there is the manifestation no less, of the reach of human activity ; and so apparent are the steps to the great sequence, that a child can tell you that Miriam sung as an exulting victoress, only because she watched as a tender sister. As beheld in that painful night-watch, she is vastly more than a trustful venturess upon God, she is positively and powerfully a fellow-worker with God, in the ultimate salvation of Israel's champion ; in the amazing glories of Israel's victories. Keeping vigil by that palmy Nile, she is touching a hidden spring in that great mechanism, whereby at last there will be rolled the Red Sea's strength on the host of the pursuing Egyptians. She is working rather than watching : and thus worketh true faith ever. It is no weak and indolent and slumberous thing ; it hath a yearning desire, and a stanch purpose, and an iron sinew, and a fiery heart. It will not leave the infant Moses in the Levite's chamber because God can protect by miracle ; it launches him carefully on the Nile's waters because God worketh through means even in miracles. It lulls not Miriam to dream joyously because God's eye is on the infant ; it girds her to keep the more earnest watch because God watches through her ; and its victory is glorious on the Red Sea's border, only because its ventures were in earnest well doing on the banks of the Nile.

Thirdly. And now combining into one, these lessons thus imperfectly sketched, how powerfully will these contrasted scenes speak of *the might of woman's influence fellow-working with God.*

If there be a truth patent in these inspired biographies, it is, that

woman's is no subordinate part in the great drama of God's moral providence. And no where does this truth show more nobly than in these contrasted pictures.

The triumph on the Red Sea's shore, we have seen to be a philosophic sequence of the Nile's lone vigil; so that, had Jochebed failed in the weaving of rushes or Miriam faltered in her earnest watch, the whole after-fate of the deliverer had been changed, and the whole plot of the great Hebrew drama disastrously marred. And it is well worthy your closest attention, how in God's economy of providence, Israel's deliverance could have been achieved by no other means. Upon careful perusal of the preceding context, the impossibility seems absolute, that Moses could be saved. By all the malign power of a resistless despot is the child hemmed in unto certain destruction. And had all the tribes of the Hebrew blood gathered in mailed strength, to sentinel his cradle, Egypt's war host had scattered them as the wind; and only the sooner for such protection, had the young child died. And yet a work manifestly too great for all Israel's chivalry, is here achieved well, through woman's ministries of love and faith. That frail ark of rushes hath surrounded the babe with a bulwark more impregnable than a munition of adamant! And the watch of that sister's eye hath sentinelled the babe more stanchly than the vigil of a diademed archangel! And resulting as this woman's work did, in the safety of the exposed ark, and Israel's ultimate deliverance, what calculus of ours shall sum its magnificent issues! Behold the maid by the river bank, her little hands pressed close to her tender breast, and her tearful eye fast in its strong love on the babe's low bed; and yet vastly more is she doing through that solemn night, than keeping watch over the exposed Hebrew. Within that ark of rushes, there lies tossed on the Nile, the germ of Israel's fast coming deliverance! The germ of a world's triumphant redemp-

tion ! And yet Miriam alone keepeth vigil. And so it will seem to you, that all the miracles of that deliverance, all the matchless victories of the Tribes over the broad lands of the Canaanite, all the national splendors of the old Hebrew race, under the majestic line of her kings ; yea, and farther on, in the fulness of time, all the greater glories of the Messianic redemption ; the victory of the Incarnate over death ; and the flashing of glad light through the grave ; and the casting down of Hell's proudest array ; and the ultimate enthronement on a redeemed world of the Prince of the great spiritual Israel ; and the swell of the great song up in Heaven, of the thousands of thousands with palms and white robes ; and all the amazing and incomprehensible issues of that redemptive plan waxing glorious through Eternity ! These ! All these, I say, will seem to you in the economy of God's moral Providence, to suspend themselves on woman's ministry ; on Jochebed's careful toil with the rushes, on Miriam's faithful watch by the Nile. And who, then, will dare call such a ministry subordinate ? Why, one of God's loftiest plans, one of God's most magnificent purposes, lies cradled and incarnate in that vessel of rushes, and woman only keeping God's watch. Not Miriam's part was it indeed, to stand girt with awful power in the presence of Pharaoh ; not hers to bear that wonderworking rod along the marvellous Exodus ; not hers to lead forth the armies of God, in the pomp of their victories ; but yet, hers it was, to touch the wires and mingle the elements of issues as amazing ; to bring unto the God of Heaven, honors as high, and acknowledgments as magnificent ; watching thus by the Nile, in true-hearted love ; going forth thus, with timbrel and dance, on the Red Sea's shore.

And in all this, how powerful is the lesson of encouragement, to woman, to come up to her high prerogative of efficient co-working with Jehovah. Hers has never been, shall never be, a subordinate

part in the great drama of Redemption. Having to do with our nature in its earlier developments, her influence plays into the mechanism of the moral universe at a point nearer than man's to the great Mainspring. Watching her babe's sleep, she is watching, it may be, the germ of earth's mightiest revolutions; rocking her cradled child, she is rocking, it may be, into power, the very largest of God's great purposes; leading forth her faltering infant with a feeble hand, she is launching, it may be, into glorious career, the most stupendous train of the providences of the Eternal! So that, in the winding up of the great drama, when the issues of all actions are revealed, haply it may be made manifest, that the loftiest triumphs unto the Redeemer have been won by woman's trustful faith and earnest love. And as bringing nobler glory unto God, in the power of her far-reaching influence, woman's may be the loftiest reward in the triumphs of Eternity! And more magnificent than the achievements of Israel's crowned Kings and triumphing conquerors, may seem the simple record of Israel's women. And fuller of glory on the canvas of Eternity, than even Elijah in the fire of his rapture, or Moses in the pomp of his victories, may seem these scenes in the life of this prophetess;—Miriam watching the babe by the Nile's green border! Miriam chanting God's triumph on the Red Sea's shore!