

Children of the Old Testament

Anonymous

The background of the lower half of the page is a solid teal color. It is decorated with various purple geometric shapes, including horizontal and vertical lines, diagonal lines, a quarter-circle arc, a square with a downward-pointing triangle inside, and a solid upward-pointing triangle. These shapes are scattered across the teal area, creating a modern, abstract pattern.

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*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CHILDREN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT ***

Produced by Al Haines

Joseph sold by his brethren.
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CHILDREN

OF THE
OLD TESTAMENT

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CHILDREN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

JOSEPH THE DREAMER.

Two boys, Joseph and Benjamin, sons of a rich Eastern shepherd, lived in their father's wide tent in the great valley of Hebron. Joseph was about seventeen years of age, and tall and strong, so that he could drive sheep, herd cattle, and work in the harvest field. Benjamin was a little red-cheeked boy of five, with merry brown eyes, and his brother Joseph loved him very dearly, for their mother was dead. The father of the boys, whose name was Jacob, had thousands of sheep and hundreds of camels, asses, and cattle, so that he was looked upon as a very rich man; and he had ten grown-up sons, who roamed about the country feeding the sheep in the green valleys and by the water-brooks.

Joseph was dearly loved by Jacob, because the boy had been born when his father was an old man; and that was one reason why his older brothers hated Joseph and did all they could to annoy him. Perhaps they feared that their father would leave all his wealth to his favourite son, and you know that this sometimes makes quarrels among brothers and sisters.

Now Jacob showed his special love for Joseph by making him a coat of many colours—a long tunic with stripes of red, green, blue, and yellow, having a coloured fringe at the knee, and a bright shawl to bind it closely round his waist. Joseph was very proud of this coat, but the others hated both it and him, believing that he would get the best of everything from their father—all but Reuben, the eldest, who loved the lad, and smiled kindly when he saw his gay tunic.

One day at the harvest-time the sons of Jacob were all at home, cutting down the yellow grain, and taking it away on the backs of asses to the threshing-place. Joseph, of course, worked with them, but they were always finding fault with him, and trying to vex him. He knew, however, that his father loved him, and this

made him able to bear their unkindness with patience. Besides, his mind was filled with boyish thoughts of how great he would be, and what he would do, when he grew up to be a man. He was very strong for his years, and joined with the women in tying the grain into bundles, and loading it on the asses; and it was very hard work, indeed, out there in the scorching Eastern sun.

But rest came at night. When Joseph lay down with his little brother on a heap of straw at the back of the tent, he slept soundly, and dreamt the golden dreams of youth.

He dreamt one night that they were all binding sheaves once more out in the sunny field, and his brothers' sheaves rose up and bowed down to his sheaf. Joseph took it all in earnest, and next day he told the dream to his brothers, perhaps as they were sitting at their midday meal in the shade of a spreading tree; but he soon knew from their angry faces that they saw nothing pleasant in it, and when his story was told they called out to him,—

"Shalt *thou*, indeed, reign over *us*?"

They were jealous of him, and, of course, this did not make them any kinder to the young lad. But Joseph remembered what his father had told him—that dreams were sometimes messages from God; and he believed that his dream was a message, and that he would one day be greater than all his brothers. They also believed in dreams, and feared that what the boy had dreamt might come true, so that they began to hate him all the more.

In those days people thought that the stars had a great deal to do with their lives; and certain men said that they could tell what would happen to a new-born child when he grew up by looking at the stars which were to be seen in the sky at the time of his birth.

Now Joseph looked often at the stars, and wondered who placed them there, and what they had to do with him. And one night as he lay asleep in his father's tent he had another dream, and this time it was about the stars that could be seen through a slit in the tent, gleaming and sparkling in the dark blue sky. He dreamt that the sun and the moon and eleven of the largest of the twinkling stars came and bowed down to him.

He told this dream also to his angry brothers, as well as to the old man his father, who gently checked him for his vain thoughts. He had, however, a soaring

mind, and had more dreams still, of which we are not told, so that his brothers gave him, partly in mockery, the name of "Joseph the Dreamer."

Now at certain seasons grass was somewhat scarce in the Vale of Hebron, so at one time Jacob sent his sons away with their sheep and cattle to seek food in other valleys where the grass was longer green. They went along the hills to the beautiful Vale of Shechem, fifty miles away; and after some time had passed the old shepherd began to wonder if they were all well, for he had not heard from them for some days.

It was his usual custom when his sons were away from home to send a messenger to them with cheese, butter, and wine, and other nice things to eat; and this time he asked Joseph to go. Now, a camel ride of fifty miles was not an easy undertaking, for there were robbers in these parts, and the old man was much pleased when Joseph said he was not afraid to set out on the journey.

Mounted on a strong camel, with side baskets filled with cakes of figs, dried raisins, parched corn, and leather bottles of oil and wine, the young lad rode away. He was dressed in his favourite coat of many colours, protected by his long cloak, while a bright kerchief covered his head, and a spear and club hung at his saddle. And as his father watched him going along the yellow track and over the hill towards the Bethlehem road, he sent up a prayer for his safe return.

When Joseph came in due time to the Vale of Shechem, he wandered about asking the few people he met for his brothers; and at last he was told by a certain man that he must ride to a place called Dothan, where there were two wells, for his brothers were there feeding their flocks. This he did, and in due time came to the spot where his brothers were resting.

"Who is this coming over the hill from Shechem?" said the brothers to each other, as they shaded their eyes with their hands to watch Joseph coming down the track into the plain.

They expected more riders to follow him, but no more came, and they wondered who the lonely traveller could be. After a time the newcomer urged his camel into a trot across the plain, and they soon saw that it was Joseph.

"Behold, this dreamer cometh!" cried one. Now they had their father's favourite in their power.

"Let us slay him for his dreams, and throw him into some pit," said another; "and we will say that some wild beast has eaten him up."

But Reuben, one of the ten, would not hear of hurting the lad, though he agreed to their putting him into a pit; for he had made up his mind that when the night came he would help the lad out again, and send him home to his father.

Shouting to his brothers in his joy at finding them, Joseph urged on his camel; but no answering shout came back again, and his heart sank within him. His camel knelt on the ground, and leaping off its back, he turned to his nearest brother for the kiss of welcome; but a strong arm warded him off.

He turned to another in surprise, only to meet with the same cold dislike. He told them what his father had sent, and took out the presents from the camel-bags, giving them the old shepherd's kind messages. But it was all of no use. He could not make friends of these dark, bearded men, whose flashing eyes spoke only of their bitter hatred towards the young lad their brother.

Seizing him roughly, they stripped him of his coat of many colours, and leading him to a deep hole in the ground called a pit, they pushed him in. What would become of his dreams now?

"Let him die there of thirst and hunger," they said, as they turned to feast upon the good things the lad had brought to them with such a joyful heart.

Meanwhile Reuben had gone away, so as not to see his brother treated cruelly; and now the men feasted together in sullen silence, for they were by no means happy.

While they sat eating they watched a string of camels come over the hills to the north, and draw nearer and nearer across the plain; and before long they saw that the travellers were a band of merchants taking slaves and spices to the distant land of Egypt. Slaves! That was the very thing; and a flush came over the face of Judah as he said to his brothers,—

"What shall we gain if we kill our brother? Let us sell him to these men. Let us not harm him, for, after all, he is our brother."

So they helped Joseph out of the pit and showed him to the merchants, who saw that he was a handsome lad, such as would bring a good price in the slave-

market in Egypt, where red-cheeked boys were of greater value than black boys of the desert; and they bought him for twenty silver pieces, which they counted out to Judah upon the ground.

Tied with a rope like a dog to his master's camel, Joseph was led away by the dusky merchants on their slow march to Egypt. They did not heed his cries and tears, for they bought and sold boys and girls, as other men bought and sold sheep and cattle, almost every day of their lives.

When night drew near, and Reuben came quietly towards the edge of the pit and called his young brother's name, he got no answer but the sighing of the wind in the grass. Believing that the lad was dead, Reuben tore his clothes in his grief, and ran quickly to his brothers' tents; but they hid the truth from him, and having dipped Joseph's tunic in the blood of a goat which they had killed, they brought it to his father.

"This have we found," they said. "Tell us now whether it is your son's coat or not."

Then the old man knew it at once, and said, "It is my son's coat; an evil beast has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces." And in his bitter grief he tore his garments after the manner of his people, while his sons and daughters tried in vain to comfort him.

"I will go down to the grave," he said, "mourning for my son."

THE STORY OF BENJAMIN.

I.

Joseph was bought from the merchants by an officer who had command over the soldiers of Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt; and after a time of trial he prospered so well that he became one of the chief officers of the king, having among other tasks the care of the royal granaries or storehouses of corn.

Now Joseph, who was very wise and thoughtful, caused great storehouses of brick to be set up in all the cities, and he told the people to place in these granaries one-tenth of the yield of each year's harvest. This he did to guard against any time of famine which might fall upon the land.

For seven years of plenty this was done, and after that there came upon the land and upon all the lands round about seven years of famine; and only in the land of Egypt was there corn for the people. And when the people cried to Pharaoh for bread he said, "Go unto Joseph; what he saith to you, do." Then Joseph opened all the storehouses, and sold corn to the Egyptians. And from all the countries round about people came into Egypt to buy corn.

Far away in the Vale of Hebron the famine was sore, and the sons of Jacob did not know what to do. Then when things were at their worst news came to Jacob that there was corn in Egypt. So he sent his ten sons away with their empty sacks and their asses to buy corn for their families. They wished to take their young brother Benjamin with them, but their father would not allow them. He had lost Joseph, he said, and he would not risk Benjamin with them.

Having crossed many a weary mile of yellow sand and barren rock, they were stopped by a high wall set with forts and gates guarded by soldiers; and they had to say what they wanted before they were allowed to pass into Egypt.

For days they walked by the side of the great river Nile, along the road to Memphis, where the king's stores were, and at length they saw the city upon an island in the river. Stepping into broad ferry-boats with their animals, they were taken over, and went up the long road, lined on each side with the figures of winged lions in stone, towards the wide market-place of the great city. There they made known what they wanted, saying that they had come from Hebron to buy corn; and their names and business were written down on a tablet, which was taken to the keeper of the granaries.

Word soon came that they must go before the keeper; and they were warned to be careful what they said, for he was one of the king's chief officers. Taking off their sandals and cloaks at the steps, the ten Hebrew shepherds went between the pillars at the door and stood waiting.

Within sat a young Egyptian, dressed in a robe of white linen, and wearing a great black wig of horsehair with many small plaits. His scribes sat at tables

below him, writing down any orders he might wish to give.

An Egyptian soldier told the sons of Jacob to go forward. Then the ten men went in and knelt down humbly before the young Egyptian; nor did they rise until he gave them leave. He looked at them and frowned, and they were afraid.

"Where do you come from?" the officer asked sharply.

"From the land of Canaan, to buy corn," was the humble answer.

"You are spies!" he cried in a passion. "You have come to spy out the weakness of the land. What is your calling? Who are your friends?"

The ten Hebrews could scarcely speak for terror. They had heard terrible stories of how these fierce Egyptians never allowed spies to get out of their country alive.

"No, my lord; thy servants have come to buy food," said one. "We are all one man's sons," cried another. "We are honest men; thy servants are no spies," pleaded a third.

But the great Egyptian only listened with a frown to their whining voices. "No," he replied firmly; "you have come to spy out the weakness of Egypt. Is your father alive? Have you another brother?"

Why was this man so angry with them? they wondered.

"We belong to one family of twelve brothers," Judah replied. "We have a father, an old man, and another brother, the child of his old age, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him much. We are the sons of one man in Canaan, and truly the youngest is now with our father, and one other is dead."

Was he still angry? They lifted their dark eyes to the stern face of the young Egyptian.

"I see you are spies," was the harsh reply, but his voice was softer. "In this way I will prove you. By the king's life, you shall not go back unless your younger brother is brought here to me. Send one among you to bring him, and the rest of you shall be kept in prison until he returns. So shall I prove whether

what you say is true. If you will not do this, then by the king's life you are spies indeed!" He waved them away with his hand, and the Egyptian soldiers pushed them out at the door, telling them that they must come away at once to prison.

As they sat on the earthen floor of the prison looking at each other in silence, they felt amazed and full of sorrow, thinking that they would never see their tents and their little ones again. For they did not know that the king's officer was their own brother Joseph, and that instead of being angry, he was really filled with joy at seeing them after twenty years of separation. As for his angry words, he was only trying them, and meant nothing but kindness, as we shall see.

II.

Joseph's brothers were to be kept in prison until they settled who should ride back in haste to Hebron to bring Benjamin down into Egypt; but Joseph's heart was tender, and after a while he began to think that perhaps he had been too harsh with them.

One man, he told himself, could not carry enough corn to feed all the starving families in Hebron, and it might be dangerous for him to ride back alone. His old father, too, would be anxious. So he sent word to the prison that the brothers might all go home but Simeon, who must stay in prison until the rest came back with their young brother.

He also gave orders that they were to have their corn-sacks filled, and that each man's money was to be secretly tied up again in the mouth of his sack.

All the brothers were glad but Simeon, who begged them to come back as quickly as they could; and riding on their high camels, with their well-laden asses tied to each other in a long line, they left the Egyptian city, thankful to get away, and went back to their old father in Hebron.

Jacob was glad to see them again, but he would not believe their story about Simeon being left behind; and he refused to let them have Benjamin, for he said that Joseph was once taken and never came back, and that the same fate would befall the other son of his old age.

When they said that the Egyptian ruler had ordered them to bring their young brother down, their old father only asked, with flashing eyes, why they told the Egyptian that they had another brother. They replied quite truly that he asked them the question. Jacob did not believe them, and this made him all the more determined not to trust Benjamin with them.

But the corn which they had brought was soon finished, and the old man urged his sons to go back to Egypt for more. They refused to do so unless they could take Benjamin with them; and after holding out for a long time, at last their father yielded. He bade them make up a little present of honey and dates and simple country things for the terrible Egyptian, hoping that the great man would not be unkind to his youngest son. Then with hands upraised he asked God's blessing upon his sons, and with a sorrowful heart saw them ride away.

Mounted on strong camels, and followed by a string of asses with the empty corn-sacks on their backs, the ten brothers left the Vale of Hebron, and rode slowly across the hot desert to one of the gates of the great Egyptian wall. Again they came to the island, and were ferried over to the city as before.

The camels knelt in the wide marketplace, where Joseph had been sold as a slave twenty years before, to wait while one of the brothers went to tell the doorkeeper of Joseph's house that the ten shepherds of Canaan had returned with their youngest brother. After waiting for a time they were told that the king's officer would see them.

Joseph was glad when he heard that his brothers had come back again, and that they had brought his youngest brother with them. Pulling his black wig down over his brow to hide his pleasure, he ordered them to be brought in; and when they came and knelt before him, it was not on Judah or Reuben, but on the young man Benjamin, that he fixed his searching eyes.

His brother had grown so much that he hardly knew him for the little boy who used to run about the camp holding his hand as he took him to see the little lambs and the small black kids at play.

"Take these men to my house, for I shall dine with them to-day," was all Joseph said. The brothers were amazed when the meaning of the Egyptian words was made known to them. And when the gates of the courtyard closed behind them, they thought they were prisoners again, and sat down on the stone

pavement to sigh and mourn.

But at noon there came a loud knocking at the gate, and the red and green chariot of the great Egyptian drove in, and soon they were summoned to stand before him. With their simple presents in their hands, they went through the garden and into his beautiful house, and kneeling, laid the gifts at his feet.

"Is your father well?" the great man asked in a kindly voice. "The old man of whom you spoke—is he still alive?"

"Thy servant our father is alive and in good health," they answered humbly.

"Is this your younger brother, of whom you spoke?" he asked again, speaking as if he did not know one from another. Benjamin answered with a low bow; and Joseph said, "May God be gracious to thee, my son!" Then Benjamin looked up at him, and Joseph felt the tears coming into his eyes; and rising from his chair, to the surprise of the men, he left the hall. They did not know why he had done so. But if they had seen him in his own room weeping like a child for very joy, they would have been more astonished still.

The meal was served, and the ten brothers were surprised when the Egyptian ruler set them at a table all in the order of their ages; but even yet they did not know who he was. Joseph sat at a table by himself, with a beautiful silver wine-cup before him, and he sent plates of choice food to each of his brothers; but he sent to Benjamin five times as much as to any of the rest.

Next morning they were sent home with their asses laden with well-filled corn-sacks. They were very glad to get away so quickly, and they wondered as they went why the great Egyptian had been so kind to them. But even yet the thought that he might be none other than Joseph had not entered their minds.

III.

Now Joseph had told his overseer that as he filled the brothers' corn-sacks he was to put their money into them again, and also to take his own beautiful silver cup and put it into the mouth of Benjamin's sack. This was done for a purpose, as we shall see.

Next day, when the brothers had set out on their journey, the overseer was sent for by his young master, who ordered him to put horses into his chariot, to ride after the ten Hebrews, and to ask them why they had stolen his master's silver cup.

Cracking his whip as he went, the Egyptian drove along the road, and soon overtook the returning travellers. Checking his horses, he stepped out of his red chariot and sternly asked why they had returned evil for good by stealing his master's precious silver cup; and he smiled when he saw the fear in the faces of the dusky Hebrews, and laughed when they all said that they knew nothing of the cup.

He did not believe them, he said, and would search for the cup himself; and he laughed again when they said he could search at once, and if he found it with any one of them, he could put that man to death and make all the rest of them the slaves of his master.

Of course the silver cup was found in Benjamin's sack; and pointing his finger at him, the Egyptian said that he would take him back to be his master's slave, but as for the rest of the men, they could go on their journey to their homes.

The brothers wrung their hands at these words, and their hearts sank within them. Judah had promised his father that he would bring Benjamin back again safe and sound, and now the lad was to become the slave of this terrible young ruler! After all, the man's kindness of the day before was only intended to make them feel the pain all the more when he seized their young brother to be his slave. They could not return to their old father without him. They would go back to the Egyptian city, they said, and all go to prison together rather than part with Benjamin.

In those days, when Hebrews were overcome with grief they tore their clothes, that all might see how sorrowful they were; and Judah was the first to seize his tunic and tear it down the front from neck to hem, and the others did the same. In a mournful procession they followed the Egyptian's chariot back to the city; and the people gazed at them as they passed, and laughed.

When they reached Joseph's house and entered the courtyard, they sent in a very humble message, begging that he would see them. And when they came

into his presence they knelt before him with bowed heads, till their brows touched the coloured pavement.

"What is this that you have done?" he asked. "Do you not know that such a man as I can find out secret things?"

Joseph wished to frighten them, but in his heart he was glad that his brothers had not gone away, leaving Benjamin behind in slavery. They were kinder now than on that day so long ago when they sold him to the dark merchantmen in the far-off Vale of Dothan.

In a pleading voice Judah told the terrible Egyptian that all of them were now his slaves. But Joseph replied that he only wanted the man who stole his silver cup; the rest could return to their father.

Then Judah had more to say. Holding up his hands for mercy, he told the story of how they had begged their old father to let Benjamin come; adding that if they returned without him, the old man would die of grief. And to Joseph's surprise, he begged that he would let him stay behind and be his slave for ever in place of his young brother, and let Benjamin go home to his father.

At times while Judah was speaking Joseph looked at Benjamin, and sometimes he turned away his head lest they should see the tears in his eyes. And when his older brother offered to be his slave for ever, the young Egyptian suddenly ordered every one to leave the room but the Hebrews; and he remained silent, with his head turned away, while his Egyptian friends and servants went slowly out.

As soon as they were all gone he sprang to his feet, and held out his hands to his brothers, calling to them in Hebrew,—

"I am Joseph! Is my father indeed alive?"

The men gazed at him in amazement. What would this terrible Egyptian do next? Who was this who knew about their brother whom they had sold into slavery? They were dumb with wonder.

"Come nearer to me, I beg of you," he pleaded. It was the voice of Joseph that rang in their ears. They came nearer, and gazed up at the great man. These cheeks were too ruddy for an Egyptian, and these brown eyes—were they not the

eyes of Joseph!

"I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt!" he cried. They could no longer doubt that he spoke the truth to them; and as they came forward he clasped them in his arms one by one, weeping for very joy. Then seeing in their eyes the deep sorrow for their past unkindness, he added,—

"Be not grieved nor angry that you sold me into Egypt, for it was God who sent me hither to save many lives in the years of famine. I am lord of the king's palace and ruler of all Egypt."

Then he took his wondering brothers home with him to stay in his fine house, where his Egyptian wife and their little children lived; and after a time he sent them away, laden with presents, and with wagons to bring down their children and their old father Jacob into Egypt. For they were all to come down, he said, and live in the golden and fruitful land of Goshen, and he would watch over them there.

THE CHILD MOSES.

I.

Jacob and his sons stayed in Egypt until the old man died. Then Joseph carried his body back to Hebron in a great funeral procession, and having buried him beside his wife, who had been dead for a long time, came back again to Egypt.

The Hebrews expected to return to Canaan soon, but that was not to be. In course of time Joseph and his brothers died, but still the Hebrews, or Israelites, as they were also called, stayed on in Egypt, and in time grew into a great nation. Then a new king came to the throne, who was afraid of their numbers, and made slaves of them all, forcing them to make bricks and build for him great walls, forts, and buildings of all kinds.

They were taken in gangs, guarded by soldiers, to the place where the brown

river clay was thick; there they dug it out with spades, trod it with their feet, and worked it with their hands until it was wet and soft. Then they shaped it with little square boxes into brown bricks for building. Other workers placed the bricks in baskets and carried them away to the boats in the river, for the boatmen to take up to the great cities where the walls were being built.

Some of the Israelites toiled at building these high brick walls, storehouses, forts, and even cities for the great king; and it is not unlikely that some of the Pyramids, which we now see standing on the banks of the Nile, were built by these poor slaves in the days now long gone by.

Others, again, were driven out to the fields to drag wooden ploughs up and down like cattle, to dig with small wooden spades, and to clear the land of stones; and when the harvest came, they cut down the crops and threshed out the grain, and carried it off to their master's storehouses.

Others had to stand on the bank of the river all day long, filling buckets with water and emptying them into little drains that ran away into the fields. And over all these slaves were slave-drivers, who stood beside them with long whips to lash them if they did not work hard enough. So the poor Israelites were very unhappy, and often prayed to God that they might be set free again; for they were the lowest labourers in the land, toiling for those who gave them no money for their work.

But for all this they increased more and more in numbers, until the king was afraid that they might some day side with his enemies and fight against him, and then he would be in great danger; so he treated them more cruelly still, and at last ordered all the boy children that were born to the Israelites to be thrown into the river.

The babe among the bulrushes.

The babe among the bulrushes.

There was great weeping and sorrow amongst the Hebrew mothers when they heard of the king's cruel order. And they did many strange and brave things to save their little ones, and did indeed save many of them; but many others perished, so that there was grief instead of joy in the poor Hebrew huts whenever a baby boy was born.

Now, Jochebed, one of those Hebrew mothers, lived in the city of the great king, so close to the side of the blue Nile that the white walls of the royal palace were reflected in the water. She had a little baby boy, so beautiful that she told her husband he must not be thrown into the river where the crocodiles were, for she herself would save him alive.

She had two other children—Miriam, a girl of fifteen, and Aaron, a little boy of three—and she told them that they were not to tell any one they had a little baby brother in the house lest the king's soldiers should come and take him away and throw him into the river. And she kept her little baby carefully hidden in the house, running to him every time he cried lest he should be heard outside, and trembling each time a soldier passed her door.

For three months she was able to keep her child hidden from the slave-drivers. Often did she pray to God that he might never be found; and she loved her baby all the more because of the danger he was in.

But at last a day came when his mother could keep him hidden no longer. With a sorrowful heart she saw that she must get him away, although at the moment she could not tell how to do so. Then she weighed him in her arms, measured him with her hands, and made up a plan to save him such as only a mother's heart could devise.

She had seen a fair Egyptian princess coming down from the palace every morning to bathe in the river at a place not far from her hut; and she thought that if this princess could only see her lovely baby boy she would save him.

So this Hebrew mother went down to the river and gathered an armful of strong reeds. With these she wove a stout basket long enough and wide enough to hold her baby boy. Then she painted it inside and out with black bitumen, until not a drop of water could get in. She lined it next with soft cloth of red and green, as mothers line their cradles, and then it was ready to be placed on the water and save the life of her little boy.

II.

The morning sun shone brightly on the broad surface of the Nile, turning the

Pyramids on the banks into dull gold, and lighting up the palaces of the city; and while the white-robed priests went up to the temple roof to beat the brass gong and chant their hymn to the morning, the poor Hebrews flocked in thousands out of their little yellow huts, to do their heavy tasks amongst the wet, brown clay by the riverside.

Taking Miriam with her, Jochebed, the Hebrew mother, stole out of her hut, carrying a little black basket shaped like a boat, with something asleep in it, hidden under her wide blue cloak. Crossing the fields, she went down to the riverside and along the path until she came to the beach of golden sand where the red-feathered hoopoes strutted in the sun—the place where the princess came to bathe, not far from the lilies of white and yellow.

As they went she told Miriam what she was to do when the princess came, and then stepping down to the water's edge at a place where the lilies grew thick, she opened the basket, kissed something in it, and covered it over again. Stepping into the water, she gently put down the little basket to float among the water-flags, where the princess could not help but see it as she came along the path on the bank above.

With tears running down her cheeks, this Hebrew mother turned away, praying, as she went, that all would be well with her little child; while Miriam, going a short way off, sat down on the sand to watch until the lovely princess came.

Slaves in red tunics, with swords at their sides, bowed low down to the earth as they opened the palace gates to let out a bright throng of girls, laughing and singing as they went on their way down to the river; and the wind blew aside their thin robes of white and pink and soft blue, showing bare feet thrust into little slippers of red and yellow leather. Foremost of the band walked the young princess, holding a white bud of the lotus lily and smelling it as she went, while slave girls kept the hot rays of the sun from her head with fans of peacock feathers. She, too, had red slippers on her feet, and her neck and arms shone like pale copper; but she wore no chains or rings, for she was going to bathe, and her brown eyes looked with pleasure upon the cool waters of the broad river.

She did not notice the Hebrew girl sitting on the sand as she walked along the river's bank; but in a few moments she saw a strange little black object floating among the green flags, and at once sent some of her maidens to bring the strange

thing to her.

Running down to the water, the girls lifted out the little dripping basket, wondering what was in it that made it feel so heavy; but soon a little cry from within told them, and they went quickly with their burden to the princess, to ask what they should do with it.

The dark eyes of the Hebrew girl were watching them as she sat playing at odd and even with round stones from the river—a favourite game of the children of Egypt. She saw them bring the basket to the princess. She saw her smile, and noticed her pleased cry when they opened the lid; and she heard her speaking kindly to the little child, which was crying loudly. The girls were crowding round the open basket, looking in at the child; and when they placed the basket upon the ground and looked about them in doubt, Miriam knew that her time had come, and went timidly forward.

"This is one of the Hebrew children," the gentle princess said, with pity in her voice, as she looked at the baby's red cheeks, so different from the brown cheeks of the Egyptian babies. The little boy still wept loudly, and the princess's heart was touched, for he would not stop crying. What was to be done?

Running with bare feet upon the hot sand, Miriam, clad in the rough red and blue of a Hebrew slave girl, drew near to the princess, and kneeling down at a little distance, said,—

"Shall I run and call a nurse from among the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?"

The princess knew that such baby boys were to be thrown into the river; but perhaps the meaning of it all dawned upon her as she talked with her maidens, for she turned with a smile to the kneeling girl, and said simply, "Go."

With light feet and a beating heart Miriam sped away to the spot where her mother was hiding, calling to her in Hebrew as she went to come quickly. The princess and her maidens looked with amusement at the Hebrew woman as she came swiftly forward and knelt before them; and the whole of the mother's little plot was clearly seen in her blushing cheeks and tear-filled eyes. This clever little slave girl had found a Hebrew nurse very, very quickly!

"Take this child away and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages,"

the princess said to the kneeling woman; and she smiled again when the little child ceased weeping and held up his little chubby arms as soon as this Hebrew woman's face bent over him. She was indeed the mother, but the princess would tell no one, for thenceforth the boy was to be as her own child.

When the little child grew up this good princess took him into her lovely palace to be her son; and she called him Moses, because that name meant that he was taken out of the water. And there is a pretty story told about this same princess by an old Jewish writer, though it is not to be found in our Bible.

He says that the princess was so proud of the boy that one day she brought the little fellow to her father the king, that he might see how beautiful he was. The king took off his golden crown and put it on the child's curly head; but the little boy took it off again, and putting it upon the ground, tried to stand upon it, which amused the king and his courtiers very much. The old Jewish writer says that this showed how the little boy would one day force this king to set free the Hebrews, which indeed he did, as the Bible tells us. For Moses became, when he grew up, the great leader of the Israelites, who led them out of Egypt to the promised land of Canaan, where in time, after much fighting, they founded a kingdom of their own.

RUTH THE GLEANER.

In the days before there was a king in Israel a woman called Naomi, whose name means "the pleasant," lived in the little village of Bethlehem; and when at one time food was scarce, she left the place with her husband and two sons, and went over into the land of Moab, where there was plenty of food to eat.

For ten years she lived in that land, and there her sons married Moabite girls. Then heavy trouble came upon Naomi, for she lost not only her husband, but her two sons also. In her sorrow Naomi's heart turned to Bethlehem, with its cluster of white houses among the hills of her own country. But before going back she bade her daughters-in-law return to their mothers' houses, where they would be happy. They both wept, and Orpah, the elder, kissed Naomi and went away; but Ruth clung to her and refused to go.

"Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee," she said; "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, I will die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me."

So they went back together to the village of Bethlehem, and Naomi in her sorrow said to her old friends, when she met them once more, "Call me not Naomi 'the pleasant,' but Mara 'the bitter;' for God hath dealt bitterly with me."

Ruth wore the dress of the village girls, of deep green and bright red, with a white veil streaming over her shoulder, and a row of coins upon her brow; and she was pleasant to look upon as she went up and down the stony path which ran from the gate in the wall to the women's well, carrying her pitcher to get water. As she moved along the path her eyes often strayed over the plains of dry grass and the fields of golden grain; for it was the rich harvest time, and she was very poor.

Rising one morning before the clouds were red over Hebron, she went down into the valley where the harvesters were at work, and followed the reapers and binders, picking up as a gleaner all the stray heads of barley she could find. As the binders were women she kept near them; and they talked kindly to her, for they knew her and had heard her sad story.

Now when Boaz, the farmer, came down to the village to see how the work went on in his field, he called out, "God be with you" to his reapers; and they answered, "May God bless you." Turning to the women, he asked the name of the strange maiden, and spoke kindly to her, calling her his daughter, and telling her to keep close to his women, where no one would touch her, and not to leave his fields. If she was thirsty, she might drink from the water-bottles from which the reapers could drink when they wished.

Kneeling before him with head bowed down, as if this farmer were a king, Ruth thanked him for his kindness to a stranger; and the man replied that he had heard of her goodness to Naomi, her mother, and praised her.

Ruth and Naomi.
Ruth and Naomi.

When the midday heat was great the reapers gathered in a shady place, and Boaz bade Ruth come and share their bread and light wine, and he gave her parched corn, as much as she could eat. In the afternoon they rose to work again, and Boaz told the reapers to let the girl glean among the sheaves, and pull out a handful here and there; and she gleaned there till the sun went down over the hills.

Now the corn that she gathered was too heavy for her to carry away as it was, so she sat down and beat the barley out between two stones, and tying it up in her veil, put it on her head, and went home with a light step. Naomi was astonished when she opened out her store in the little house; for she had gleaned more than a bushel of barley.

When she told Naomi where she had been, her mother said that Boaz was a relative of her own; and the elder woman was glad indeed to hear that he had given Ruth leave to glean in his fields during the whole of the harvest time.

And so it came about that every day at the red dawn Ruth went singing down the rocky pathway to work with the reapers in the warm Eastern valley; and as the wheat harvest followed close upon the barley harvest, she worked for many days, returning home at night with her ruddy cheeks burnt brown with the sun, to lay her heap on the floor of her mother's house; for they were laying up a little store with which to bake bread in the months of wind and rain that were before them in the coming winter.

But as time went on they did not need to live in poverty, for Boaz married Ruth at the end of the wheat harvest; and this Moabite girl became the great-grandmother of King David, the most famous king of Israel, and one of the ancestors of Jesus Christ our Lord Himself.

THE CHILD SAMUEL.

I.

When the Israelites had made their home in the promised land of Canaan, they did not forget the God of their great ancestor Jacob; but they set up on a hill called Shiloh a tabernacle, or place of worship, where they came to offer sacrifice to the God of their fathers.

Here the priests of the tabernacle killed bullocks and rams and goats, and burnt their flesh on the great altars, believing that these offerings were pleasing to God; and here the people came also to the chief of the priests whenever they had disputes with their neighbours, for the "high priest" was a judge in Israel.

Now, at one time there lived in a little cottage on the hill of Ramah, not far from what is now Jerusalem, a certain man named Elkanah, whose wife Hannah had a little boy named Samuel. The child was dearly loved by his parents, and especially by his mother, who had made up her mind that her son, when he grew up, should become a priest of the God of Israel.

The child Samuel grew, amid sunshine and wind, at his father's home on the hill of Ramah, watched by his mother with loving care; for when the time came, he was to be given to the priests in the great tent of the tabernacle on the hill of Shiloh. Three times the mother and child saw the blossoms cover the twisted branches of the olive trees and fade again; three times the valley was filled with golden wheat swaying in the wind, and the song of the reaper was heard in the fields.

Three happy years in Ramah, and the little child could run about, and talk, and shout, and take care of himself when the camels and oxen were near; then Hannah said she must now give him up to the priests. So with her husband she rode away upon a sure-footed ass, down the hills to the great festival at Shiloh, through rocky passes and across foaming streams; and her face was sad, for the little child of three sitting in her lap she would not bring back again.

She took with her a sack of meal and a leather bottle of wine, while a servant led a young bull. The animal was to be killed and burnt, while the meal and wine were to be given to the priest at the tabernacle; for these things were all to be offered as gifts to God.

Before long they saw the tabernacle on the hill of Shiloh, with its broad tent-

roof of red sheepskins, as well as the hundreds of little black tents of the tribesmen, some grouped into camps with a flag, others clustered round the springs and pools of water under the trees; and soon Hannah and her boy mingled with the crowds thronging into the walled space about the tabernacle.

With beating heart the mother saw the bull killed and her meal and wine given to the busy priests. Taking her child by the hand, she led him forward to the doorway of the tabernacle, where sat Eli, the aged chief priest. The little child clung to his mother's dark-red robe as he stood with naked feet before the old man, the hem of his sleeveless tunic scarce reaching to his knees, and his head uncovered.

"Oh my lord," said the mother, "I prayed for this child as a gift from God, and God gave me my desire; and now I give him again to God as long as he shall live."

Then she pushed forward her beautiful boy; and as Eli looked at the mother and child he was pleased, and drawing the little child to himself, he blessed the waiting woman. With bowed head and falling tears she went out at the tent door, leaving behind her the greatest treasure of her life.

Before long the black tents were taken down by the women of the tribes, the crowds of men and animals passed away through the openings in the hills, and the festival was over. And Hannah rode up with her people back to Ramah, but not before she had kissed her sweet boy once more, weeping as she did so, and telling him in soft Hebrew words that she would come again to see him.

The priests took the little child, and over his short blue tunic they drew a white linen dress like their own. After that he lived with them in one of the houses near the tabernacle on the hill of Shiloh, and they taught him how to read from the old yellow rolls of the Bible; and he served them, doing what he was told, as a little child should. And there were other brown-eyed boys of Israel there, left by their mothers, and all beautiful as little angels without wings.

Four times a year the Israelite tribes gathered round this hill of Shiloh, to bring gifts, and offer worship to God, and hold councils of war. Then little Samuel was glad, for his mother came to see him; and he ran gaily about, now looking at the leaping fires on the brass altar, now watching the clouds of sweet smoke rolling out from behind the blue curtains of the holy place of the

tabernacle.

Sometimes he was told to pour olive oil into a flickering lamp; sometimes he would sing in the choir, or carry a golden bowl or a priest's shoes; but he was never allowed to go in behind the thick veil of purple, blue, crimson, gold, and white, which hid the sacred place known as the Holy of Holies, where the gold-winged cherubs were.

Did his mother forget little Samuel? Other little children were born to her, but still she remembered him, away among bearded men in that large, dark tent; and this is how she showed her love for him. She gathered of the finest of the lamb's wool, and having dyed it purple, spun it into threads; and with her loom of strings hanging from the roof she wove a little blue gown without a seam and without sleeves, to reach from his chin to his knees; and she worked it round the broad hem with flowers and bells, and fruit of red and yellow and brown.

And each time she went to the great yearly festival she took a little blue coat with her, making it longer and longer as the child grew into a boy, and the boy became a ruddy youth; and with it, too, would go a little white willow basket with honey-comb and cheese, sweet cakes and pressed figs, such as she knew that Samuel loved.

Thus she showed her constant love for the child who had left her side, but would never leave her heart. And the child-priest grew, not only in stature, but in favour with God and men.

II.

The great tent of the tabernacle on the hill of Shiloh had thick curtains woven in colours of blue, purple, and scarlet, and a high roof covered over with red and brown skins to keep it warm and dry; the sides were of stone, and the doors of wood, with carved wooden pillars. A thick curtain of purple, scarlet, and gold hung down inside, dividing off the Holy of Holies at the end from the rest of the place, where the priests went about every day, attending to the altar of incense and the golden lamps. And there was a special golden lamp, with seven branches, which always stood close to this great purple curtain.

All was dark in the Holy of Holies behind that heavy curtain, and there stood the Ark, a box about a yard long, plated with gold and having a wreath of gold round it, under the outspread wings of two golden angels. Inside that box were two flat stones, on which were written the Commandments that God had given to His people, the children of Israel. The priests had charge of the tabernacle, and of all that was in it; and they took special care of the Ark, which was the chief treasure of the nation.

Now it was Samuel's duty to shut the wooden doors of the tabernacle at night, and sleep close to the great purple curtain and watch—a very trying thing for one so young in such a large, silent place. One night as he lay there asleep on his mat before the purple curtain, with the great lamp burning low and red, and shadows flickering about the silent place, he was suddenly roused by what sounded like Eli's voice calling him. At once he answered, "Here am I," and ran to the side of the aged priest. But the old man told the wondering boy that he had not called him, and with gentle words bade him lie down again, calling him his son.

Samuel went back to his mat, but after a while he heard the voice once more; and again he thought it was Eli, and ran to his bedside, saying that he *did* call him. Eli now saw that God was calling the boy, and told him to go and lie down, and if he heard the voice again, to answer, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth." Then the boy Samuel, in wonder and fear, returned to his sleeping-mat before the great purple curtain, and lay down with the light shining upon him. Once more he heard the voice calling,—

"Samuel, Samuel."

"Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth," he replied in a trembling voice. Then Samuel heard a voice, which told him that God meant to punish Eli for not checking his sons, who were very wicked men, and had done many things which were wrong in His sight; also that He had chosen him to be the leader and judge of the people of Israel after Eli.

The boy slept again, the temple lamp burned low before the great curtain, and the place was silent until the gray light of morning stole in. Then Samuel rose, and as he unbarred the wooden doors of the tabernacle and opened them wide, the dawn was breaking over the hills in clouds of crimson and gold, filling the holy place with the light of a new day.

The breath of morning was in his face as he looked out to the east and the rising sun; and he felt a changed boy, for he had received a message from God Himself—a call to lead the people of Israel; yet he feared to tell Eli of his vision, so great and so terrible. But after a while the old priest awoke, and calling him to his bedside put questions to him; and when he heard that he had had a vision, he bade the boy tell him all, both good and bad, and Samuel did so.

The child Samuel.
The child Samuel.

The story grieved the old man, but even yet he did not check his sons, who were now too strong for him; and for some years more they went on in their wicked ways, and he still remained the chief priest. But as he grew older and weaker Samuel grew stronger; and when he became a man, he became known through all the land for his wisdom, and the people said that Samuel was a friend of God, who had guidance from the Most High for His people. So he continued to live at Shiloh as Eli's chief helper until the old man passed away; and so the little boy of the tabernacle became in due time the chief prophet, the ruler, and the judge of Israel.

DAVID THE SHEPHERD YOUTH.

I.

Now it happened in the days of Samuel that the tribes of Israel made up their mind to choose a king to rule over them. Their choice fell upon a leader whose name was Saul, and who was made the first king of Israel.

King Saul was a brave man and a wise leader, who made the name of the Israelites feared by all their enemies round about. But after a time he acted in a way displeasing to God, and was reprov'd by Samuel in His name. Saul, however, went on in his sinful ways, and this filled the heart of the prophet Samuel, who was now an old man, with sore trouble and distress.

Samuel lived, among his young men on the little hill of Ramah, mourning

because of King Saul's sinful ways. But there came a time when God told him—perhaps in a vision—to mourn no longer. He was to fill a small horn with oil and go to the village of Bethlehem, and there anoint one of the sons of Jesse the shepherd to be the next king; but at first the old man was afraid to go, lest King Saul should hear of it and kill him.

Then one day he left Ramah early in the morning, riding on an ass, with a young man behind him driving a cow; for he gave out that he was going to offer a sacrifice to God. Their path lay to the southwards, and on by the camel road into the Hebron hills. It was a long ride, in hot autumn weather, along these stony paths glistening in the Eastern sun.

The watchers on the walls of Bethlehem saw Samuel, while he was yet a long way off, riding slowly up the rough path, with his servant driving a cow before him; and they were alarmed, for the old prophet was the chief judge in the land. Then the leading men of the place hastened out through the gate in the wall to meet him, and ask if he came to them in peace.

He answered that he had come to offer a sacrifice, and bade them wash themselves in the stream, and put on clean clothing, that they might join him in it. Riding through the low arch in the walls, he asked for Jesse, a wealthy shepherd of the place, who had hundreds of flocks and herds; and when he found him, he ordered him and his sons to wash and dress and come to the feast also. Jesse thought he was highly honoured, for he had eight sons, and he was pleased that they should show themselves before the great prophet and judge of Israel.

A fire of sticks was kindled upon the flat rock outside the village walls, on which the sacrifices were always made; and the prophet killed the cow he had brought, and cut it in pieces for burning. Part of the flesh was then placed upon the wood, and as the old man raised his hands to heaven the flames leapt up and burned the flesh; and all the time the men of the village stood round him in their rough cloaks and striped kerchiefs, looking on in silence at this solemn act of worship.

Women in their tunics of coarse blue and red, with strings of coins in their dark hair, stood apart at a distance, for they were not allowed to share in the worship of the men. The feast was to come next, at which the women would be allowed to serve the men; but before Samuel would permit it to begin, there was something else, that must be done.

Calling Jesse to him, he said that he wished to see his sons. Jesse knew at once that something important was about to happen; but the people did not know, and wondered why the feast was delayed, and what it all meant when Jesse called his sons forward by their names, and bade them walk slowly, one at a time, past the aged prophet. First came the eldest, in striped cloak and gray tunic, carrying his thick war-spear in his hand; and when Samuel marked his height and his fine face, he said,—

"Here, surely, is the chosen king."

But the voice of God within him seemed to whisper, "Nay, I have rejected him. God sees not as man sees; for man looks upon the outward appearance, but God looks upon the heart."

Then Samuel told Jesse that his eldest son was not chosen, and he passed on. Jesse next called up his second son, who walked slowly past the prophet, with sweeping cloak and club in hand, armed for the fight.

"Neither hath God chosen this," Samuel said to the father; and the second son passed on. Jesse then called forward the third, who also walked past the old prophet with head erect, and spear in hand, hoping that he would be chosen.

"Neither hath God chosen this," was all that the grim old man said of him.

The people sat in the sunshine, on the slope of the hill outside the village walls, shading their eyes and looking on in silence, until seven of the sons of Jesse, dressed and armed like chiefs, had gone slowly past the old man with the keen black eyes; but Samuel made no movement, and Jesse was deeply grieved.

"God hath not chosen these. Are all thy children here?" Samuel asked, turning sharply to the shepherd, who trembled as he replied,—

"There remains yet David; but he is my youngest son, and is watching the sheep."

David was too young to be thought of in this important business. He was down in the hollow with his shepherd's staff and dog and sling, playing upon his harp, and watching from afar the fire and smoke and crowds, as he kept his father's flocks.

"Send and fetch him, for we will not sit down to the feast until he comes," was the stern reply. The brothers were angry at this useless waste of time; but one of them was soon leaping down the stony path to the valley, shouting with his hand to his mouth, and waving a stick in the air to attract his young brother's attention.

The people waited in the sunshine, and soon they saw David, with his tunic pulled through his leather belt so as to leave his legs free, running swiftly up the hill, for he was very fleet of foot. He came in his shepherd's torn and soiled garb, and had to wash at the brook before he was fit to stand before the prophet.

When at length he drew near, Samuel saw a young man, not tall, but clearly of great strength, with light hair, ruddy cheeks, and bright eyes; and he thought the youth very good to look upon as he stood before him dressed in his striped tunic and leather girdle, from which hung his shepherd's club, sling, and knife. Samuel looked at his frank face, and as he looked God said to him,—

"Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

Going forward, the old man bade the shepherd youth kneel down and uncover his head. And David did so, taking off his bright kerchief, little knowing what was about to happen. Then raising his horn before the astonished people, Samuel poured the sweet-smelling oil upon the young man's head, saying as he did so that God had chosen this young man to be a prince in Israel.

Upon this the people raised a great shout of joy, and Samuel gave the signal for the feast that was to follow. Then the men all sat down on the ground about the large wood fire, while the women came forward to serve them.

II.

David, the shepherd of Bethlehem, was not a mere boy when the prophet Samuel called him from watching his sheep to pour scented oil upon his head, and tell him, before all the people of the village, that he would one day be a prince in the land. He was already a village hero, for one day he had killed a lion that sprang upon one of his sheep as they fed in the valley to the south, near the desert country.

He had also killed a bear that tried to seize one of his young lambs; for David was so strong that he could break an iron bow with his hands, and so swift on his feet that he could catch a wild deer in a race over good ground. He was not so tall as his fighting brothers, but he was stronger, and knew how to use the sword, bow, club, sling, and spear; for all the young men of the villages learned the use of these weapons in their sports and games.

The lad was also fond of music, and could play and sing. Sitting in the shade of a shadowy rock, or at the mouth of a dark cave, as he watched his sheep wandering to and fro in the sunshine, he often played strange music upon a rude harp made by himself; and he would sing songs of his own making about the white flocks and herds, the green hills and cool streams, the red-cheeked women at the well, and the young men of the village where he had his home. He was called the "sweet singer," and his skill on the harp was well known in the villages round about Bethlehem.

When he left his own village and went to live with Samuel's young men at Ramah, to learn to read and write, he learned also to play upon the pipe and guitar, the tambourine and large harp, and to sing, not songs of love and war, but praises of God and of His goodness to men. Under the teaching of Samuel his heart opened towards God as a flower to the sun. Yet he did not always stay at Ramah, but often came back to his home, to help his father, and to watch the sheep with his brothers, who thought him too forward and did not like him much.

King Saul was now very unhappy, for the aged prophet Samuel would not see him, and the king felt that God was not with him; and he often had fits of sickness when he was in deep trouble, and only music could soothe his mind. Hearing that a harper was wanted for the king, one of David's friends praised his playing, his wisdom, his bravery, and his good looks, saying that God was with him; and when King Saul heard this he sent a messenger to Bethlehem for the shepherd-harper. Now no one ever came before the king without a gift in his hand, so Jesse sent with David an ass laden with a sack of wheat, a kid, and a skin of wine, as a present to King Saul.

With his ruddy cheeks, and his long fair hair falling upon his blue tunic, David pleased the gloomy king as he stood before him; and when the youth played softly upon the harp, and sang shepherd songs of love, passing from these into songs in praise of God, the king loved the youth greatly, and sent word to

his father that he would keep David beside him.

Jonathan, the king's son, and Michal, the king's daughter, also learnt to love the shepherd-singer as he went in and out before the king. Then Saul made him one of his fighting chiefs, who stood daily before him; and whenever his sickness came upon the king he called for the shepherd-harper, and David played music both sad and gay until the cloud passed from the king's mind. Sometimes David stayed at Gibeah, where the king's house was, and sometimes at Bethlehem; and always once a year he went home to the great family feast of the new moon, when all his father's relatives were gathered together.

III.

The fighting between King Saul and the Philistine tribes, who lived near the seacoast, never ceased; for the Philistines had made up their minds to make the men of Israel their servants, and King Saul was determined that his people should be free.

Once upon a time the Philistines gathered their young men, and came, with their battle-flags and drums, up the great Vale of Elah, the valley of oaks, to attack Saul's people. Stopping at the village of Succoth, they chose a secure place, and put up their black tents among the thick bushes, camping about ten miles from the round hill of Bethlehem.

David and Goliath.

David and Goliath.

Then King Saul sent out messengers to sound the war-horns up and down the valleys, and gather his fighting-men to drive back their old enemies. Three of David's brothers grasped their spears and bows, and joined King Saul with the men of the tribe of Judah; but David stayed for the time at Bethlehem, to take care of his old father and the flocks.

In those days soldiers had to find their own food, and armies sat down before each other for many days before they began to fight. After a time Jesse sent David with asses laden with corn and cakes for his brothers, and ten little cheeses for their captain; and David led them through the hills and down the

wide glen to the camping-place opposite Succoth, where the king's men looked across the valley to their foes on the opposite slope, while the river ran between.

Then one day the Philistines sent out a champion, a giant named Goliath of Gath, who wore a helmet of brass and a brazen coat of mail of very great weight. He had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a gorget of brass between his shoulders. The staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his shield-bearer went before him. This champion sent a boastful challenge to the Israelites, bidding them send out a man to fight with him. "If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants," ran the message; "but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants."

This challenge he repeated for forty days, but there was no man found among the men of Israel who dared to go out against Goliath of Gath.

Then Saul made it known that whoever could kill Goliath should have great riches, should marry the princess his daughter, and win great honour for himself and for his family.

Now when David reached the place with the food for his brothers, he was amazed to see that the men of Israel were so much afraid, and he asked, "Who is this Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" And those who stood around told him how the giant warrior had come out day after day, and how the king had promised to enrich the man who should slay him.

Then it was told to King Saul how David had come and had asked about the king's promise. So the king sent for the youth; and when he had been brought in, David said, "Let no man's heart be troubled, for thy servant will go and fight with the Philistine." But Saul said, "Thou art not able to go out against him; for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth."

Then David told Saul how he had killed with his own hands a fierce lion, and a bear which had stolen a lamb from the flock. "The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear. He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine," he said simply. And Saul said, "Go, and the Lord be with thee."

The king then armed David with his own armour; but the mail was too heavy for the young man, and he said, "I cannot fight with these, for I have not tested them." So he took his shepherd's staff in his hand, and choosing five smooth

stones out of the brook, put them in his shepherd's bag; and with his sling in his hand he drew near to the Philistine.

When Goliath looked at David he was filled with scorn, and disdained him; for he was but a youth, as any one could plainly see. And with a frown upon his face he said angrily, "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves? I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field."

Then David said to the boastful Philistine, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the bodies of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. And all this army shall know that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the Lord's, and He will give you into our hands."

Upon this the giant came near to meet David; and the youth made haste and took a stone out of his bag, and slung it with such skill and force that it smote Goliath in the forehead, and sank so deeply that the huge warrior fell lifeless to the ground. David then ran and stood upon the body of the giant, and having no weapon except his sling, cut off Goliath's head with his own sword. When the Philistines saw that their champion had fallen, they turned and ran without more ado.

Then with loud shouts the men of Israel rushed across the vale of oaks, shooting their arrows as they ran, for they were good bowmen. Scattering the Philistines, they drove them back to their own country, until they took refuge in their walled towns of Gath and Ekron.

After this the men of Israel returned to their enemy's camp at Succoth, and plundered the tents, wagons, sacks, and baggage. When this had been done they feasted and rejoiced over the victory, and drove off the horses and cattle of their foes, carrying everything up to their own towns and villages in the hills. And from that day forward David was the hero of all the young men of the army of Saul.

IV.

The tall, gloomy king now sent for David, the hero of the battle of Succoth, and leaning on his spear among his chiefs, Saul told the young shepherd of Bethlehem that he must not return any more to his father's house, for he was to be one of the chief captains of the army. And David was glad, for he loved fighting. When Jonathan, the king's son, saw the young shepherd standing daily among the chiefs in his father's tent, he took a strong liking for him; and as time passed his soul was knit with David's, until he loved him as he loved himself. And the king was pleased that his son and David were such good friends.

One day Jonathan took David into his tent, and there the young men promised to be friends all their lives till death should part them. Now David was very poor compared with the king's son, and had only the rough clothing of a herdsman, thick and strong, but not beautiful; so Jonathan took off his fine cloak, his gay tunic, his rich belt, and even his glittering sword and bow, and put them all upon David, giving them freely to him as a present. Then the king's son brought out other clothes and weapons, and dressed himself once more like a soldier-prince.

And when the young men came out of the tent into the sunshine, both dressed like princes, the people saw that they were as brothers; and the king saw it too, and thought that Jonathan was very foolish. But David was so strong and brave, and such a favourite with the tribesmen, that the king set him over a troop of young men; and whenever Saul went out to fight, David and his band went with him, and this greatly pleased the chiefs and the fighting-men of the army.

King Saul went on fighting with his old enemies the Philistines, who came up at certain seasons of the year to plunder the land, and had to be chased down the long valleys, and back into their walled towns again; but with David's help the king was now able to beat them as he had never done before. And each time they drove the Philistines down, the young men returned leaping, running, dancing, and showing off their skill and strength on the way; and the villagers would often come out to meet them, and rejoice also.

After one of these fights, as the tribesmen came back, with David riding beside the tall, dark king, the young women of the towns came out and danced before them on the road. Beating their tambourines, they shouted wild songs in praise of the fighting-men, singing and answering each other in turn after the

manner of the Hebrews. King Saul listened, and his brows grew dark as he heard them praising his brave young captain more than himself.

"Saul hath slain his thousands," sweetly sang one band of maidens.

"And David his tens of thousands," answered another.

These girls little dreamed what harm they were doing with their light-hearted songs. David himself was pleased with the praise of the young women, as we might expect; but as the tall king rode on he grew more angry, saying to himself as he spurred forward his horse, "What more can he have but the kingdom itself?" And he watched David from that day forward, to see whether the young man was aiming at being king.

King Saul's sickness of mind returned from time to time, and day after day David stood before him, playing upon his harp and singing the king's praises; but now Saul would not listen. David's music did not make him well as it had before, but rather worse, for he was full of suspicion of his young chief, and hated the sight of him. But the king's friends thought David's music was the best thing to restore the king to health.

Now the dark-faced king was never without a weapon near his hand; and holding his long spear, he would sit and listen to the young harper, now pleased, now angry, for he sometimes liked David and sometimes hated him. Twice he seized a little spear and flung it at him, crying out that he would pin him to the wall; but his aim was bad. Perhaps he did not mean to harm him; but at all events David avoided the weapon and ran out.

The king in his sickness of mind next became afraid of his young captain. Wishing to have him out of his sight, he set him over a band of a thousand fighting-men, and bade him live with them at a distance. But the men who were under David liked him more than ever.

King Saul now wished that David was dead, so fiercely did he hate him; but he did not think it wise to kill him himself, so he made a plan to get him killed. He offered him his daughter Merab for a wife, if he would go down the hills and fight the Philistines in their own country; and the crafty king said this, hoping that they would kill him.

Now David had no wish to marry Merab, but he loved fighting, so he went

willingly, fought stoutly with the Philistines, and came back alive. Then Saul broke his promise, and gave Merab to another man, who gave him a rich present, as was the custom when a king's daughter was wedded; and David was not sorry, for Michal, Merab's younger sister, loved the brave young captain, and he loved her in return.

Saul was pleased when he heard of this; for he hoped David would be willing to go into greater danger to win Michal as his wife. And he sent a messenger to tell David that he was well pleased with him, and would like him to marry Michal; and that as he was too poor to give the king a present, he would not ask him for one. But if he would kill one hundred Philistines within a certain time, that would stand for a present.

We are not told what Michal thought of this cruel bargain, for Saul hoped and believed that David would be killed, but David himself was well pleased. He and his young men went down the long valleys to the land of the Philistines, where they went about killing people, until they had slain two hundred; and before the appointed time was up David returned to Saul once more to tell him what he had done.

This was followed by days and nights of rejoicing among the young men of David's camp. The young women decked their hair with flowers, and danced to the sound of the timbrels, as they praised the beauty and goodness of Michal, the king's daughter; and the young men danced and shouted round the camp fires, praising David, the bridegroom, as a mighty man of valour. Saul was unwilling to give up Michal to the young captain; but he now feared him greatly, and could not break his promise. So David got the young princess Michal to be his wife; and after the death of Saul and Jonathan, who were both slain in battle, he became king of the Israelites, as Samuel, the prophet of the Lord, had foretold.

KING DAVID'S LITTLE BOY.

Sunshine fell upon the walls of King David's palace on Mount Zion. The trees in the royal gardens swayed in the breeze, and the doves fluttered up to the windows; but all was hushed and still within. Black slaves glided to and fro with

naked feet, and the women took off their tinkling armlets and talked in whispers; for in a little chamber, with shaded window and curtained door, a dark-eyed mother sat watching her child—the king's child—whose flushed cheeks showed that he was very ill and near to death.

Now when he heard that his boy was so ill, the king, who was now a man of middle age, threw himself upon the floor of his room in the bitterness of his grief and prayed to God to spare the life of the child.

His friends came and stood round and spoke to him, trying to comfort him; but he would not rise, nor let them raise him up, nor would he take any food. So he passed the dark night in praying and in sorrow, while the mother watched the child by the light of a small lamp, and slaves stood outside the chamber door to keep silence.

The morning came, and sunshine fluttered on the trees in the king's gardens and on the hills round the town. Then the king asked for the child, but the answer was that he was no better; and all the people saw that King David's grief was very great, and they wondered. For the monarch had fought in many cruel battles, and beaten his enemies, and caused the death of many men and women, and even children, and he had done many cruel things in his lifetime.

He now had riches and honour and numerous children, and was the great king of Jerusalem, living in a palace, with servants and horses and gardens and fountains, and he had brought the golden ark of God to be near him in a purple tent on Mount Zion; but he had set his whole heart on this fair-haired child, and the fear that the little one might die took the joy out of everything.

The peacocks on the walls and the doves on the roof missed the little child from the garden, where he used to come and feed them. For seven long days and seven longer nights the loving mother watched him as he lay getting slowly worse; and the king's grief was so great that he would not rise from the floor to eat by day or night, and when his slaves spoke to him he paid no heed and would not answer.

He refused to put on the fresh clothing they brought for him, or to wash in the brass basins of water held out to him, or to eat the food placed on the table at his side; but he lay on the floor of his little room groaning, and praying to God for the little one.

After a week of suffering the little one passed away in the hushed room of the king's palace at Jerusalem, and the weeping mother was led away from the bedside of her dead child. Sorrowing friends went to tell the king in his chamber; but when they came to the door of his room they stopped and whispered, saying,

"If he would not listen to us while the child yet lived, what will his grief be if we say that the boy is dead?"

The king heard them talking, and looking up, saw from their faces what had happened. Then he asked if the child was dead, and they told him, expecting that he would break out into wild grief; but he did not. Rising from the floor, where he had lain so long, he asked for water; and his slaves washed him and brought clean, fresh clothing, and combed and oiled his hair.

He spoke to no one, but went out into the sunshine and the wind; and they watched to see what he would do, and where he would go. He did not linger among the shady walks of the king's garden or by the ponds where the red lilies grew and the swans shook out their white plumes in the sun.

His friends followed him as he went slowly out of the palace gardens and away to the great tent of purple and crimson, which he liked to call the House of God, on Mount Zion; and they stopped outside when he drew the rich curtains apart and went in. There in the darkness he knelt, and with hands upraised bowed his face to the ground before God as he poured out his soul in prayer.

After a time the king came out of the great tent again, and his friends and servants followed him as he returned to his palace. He had not yet spoken, and they could not understand why he did not weep and mourn for the child. He asked for food, and they wondered yet more as he ate from the dishes which the slaves brought him.

"What is this that thou doest?" asked one of his friends. "While the child lived thou didst weep for him, and wouldst take no food; and now that he is dead thou dost rise and eat."

They thought he had been only mourning as he lay for days on the floor; but he had been praying, and now he answered them,—

"While he was yet alive I fasted and wept; for I thought, 'Who knoweth

whether God may not be merciful to me, and the child may live?' But now he is dead, and why should I fast? I cannot bring him back to life again. Some day I shall die and go to him, but he will not return to me."

Whether such thoughts as these comforted the mother's heart, we are not told; but the king himself tried to comfort her. After a time she had another little boy, and she called him Solomon, "the peaceful one," for mothers chose the names in those days. And as his nurse carried him about the garden, clad in a little blue robe with white tassels, the people said that he too was a beautiful child; and he grew up to be good and wise and handsome, and loved his mother dearly. And years afterwards this child became the great King Solomon, whom all men thought so wise.

ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW'S SON.

Ahab, the wicked King of Israel, was sitting in his house at Samaria, when suddenly there appeared before him a wild-looking man, with long hair and a cape of woolly sheepskin on his shoulders, his rough tunic girdled with a broad belt of leather, and thick sandals on his feet. Elijah, the Prophet of God, was his name. Born and bred in the wild desert country, he now dwelt amid the hills and valleys of Gilead, across the river Jordan, and he had come to warn the king that trouble was in store for his kingdom.

"As God lives, before whom I stand," he said, with upraised hand, "there shall not be dew or rain for years, but according to my word." And he said more, for this king was married to Jezebel, a wicked princess of another nation, who had got her husband to set up images and altars to Baal, a wooden idol, although he knew it was wrong. Also, to please his wife, Ahab had killed the priests of God, and set up priests of Baal in their stead; and so when King Ahab heard the words of the wild prophet he was both angry and afraid.

Elijah did not wait for an answer, but fled out of the king's house and out of the city; for he knew that when King Ahab told his terrible wife of what he had said, she would send out men to capture him, dead or alive. She had tried to kill every prophet of God in the land, and thought indeed that she had done so; but

Obadiah, the king's officer, had hidden one hundred in caves by the riverside, and kept them alive with bread and water.

So the wild prophet Elijah, with his sheepskin cape or mantle on his shoulders, fled away to the lonely country of rocks and bushes, wild beasts and robbers. But he had no fear, for he had no riches to lose, and he always carried a stout staff in his hand; and no one ever refused him shelter, for he was known everywhere as "the Man of God."

He fled eastwards, having received a message from God to go and hide in the deep valley of the Cherith, a small stream running between high banks down to the river Jordan—a place of caves where many ravens had their nests; and he had been told also that the black ravens would feed him there with the food they brought. There he hid himself from King Ahab's men, who were searching the country for him; and the ravens brought him food morning and evening, and he drank of the water of the brook until it dried up, for there was no rain.

When he could no longer live there he had another message from God, bidding him leave his hiding-place. Climbing the wooded hills of Galilee, he started to go down the other side to the town of Zarephath, by the seashore, where he would be out of King Ahab's country. With his thick staff in his hand and his woolly mantle on his shoulders, his head shaded by a shawl hanging down each side of his face, he crossed the plains, and going up a cleft in the hills, passed between them towards the coast—a journey of about seventy miles, that would take him at least four days, for he would have to keep out of sight of the king's men.

Sleeping now in a cave, now in a friendly tent, avoiding villages and bands of men, the wild prophet came to the fields outside Zarephath and waited; for the place was a walled town with a low stone archway, and gatekeepers to question all who came in.

Now as he loitered among the trees a poor woman came out to gather broken branches to kindle her fire, and the prophet called to her,—

"Bring me, I pray thee, a little water in a dish, that I may drink."

She looked at the man's strange figure, with the long black hair falling over his sheepskin mantle, and turned away with her bundle of sticks, intending to bring a drink of water to him; and when he saw that she was going home, he

called again,—

"Bring me also a morsel of bread in thine hand."

The woman, who was dressed in the rough blue and red clothing of the country, with a few brass coins in her hair, and glass beads round her neck, came nearer, and he saw from her face that she was plainly in deep distress.

"As thy God liveth," she said earnestly, "I have not one cake left, but only a handful of meal in a barrel, and a little oil in a cruse. I am only gathering a few sticks, that I may go home and bake one more cake for my son and myself, that we may eat it and then die."

"Fear not," replied the wild man in a gentle tone; "go and do as thou hast said: but make me a little cake first, and bring it to me, and afterwards make a cake for thyself and thy son. For thus saith the God of Israel, 'Thy barrel of meal shall not waste, nor thy cruse of oil fail, until the day that He sendeth rain upon the earth.'"

The woman wondered at his strange words, but she believed the man, and went away to her poor home; there she soon kindled a fire, and baked a little cake, and took it out to the hungry prophet sitting outside the city gate. Then she returned and baked another cake for herself and her son. And we are told that after that her barrel never lacked meal, neither did the oil in her cruse fail, according as the prophet had said; and Elijah stayed with the woman at her humble home.

Now it happened some time later that this widow's son fell sick and died, and his mother came to Elijah in great distress. Then the prophet took the boy and carried him up into the loft where he slept, and stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried to the Lord,—

"O Lord my God, I pray Thee, let this child's soul come into him again."

And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived. Then Elijah took him and brought him down out of the loft, and placed him in his wondering mother's arms, and said, "See, thy son liveth."

And the woman said, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and

that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth."

THE SHUNAMMITE'S BOY.

After the work of Elijah was over and God had taken him up to heaven, there was another prophet in Israel whose name was Elisha. Now it happened that one day the prophet Elisha, sitting upon his ass, with his rough cloak cast about him, came riding towards a little village named Shunem. He rode steadily onward up the steep and stony path in the afternoon heat, with his servant walking behind him.

He had come all the way from his home on the wooded hill of Carmel. He was tired and hungry, and, as was his custom, he stopped at the house of a certain Shunammite woman. Then alighting from his ass, he went up the outside stair to a little chamber on the wall, which was always ready to receive him, and there he and his servant Gehazi lay down to rest.

When morning came the prophet and his servant rose and breakfasted on bread and goat's milk, and were about to go on their way; but before leaving, Elisha told Gehazi to bring up the Shunammite woman, and the man called to her from the wall. Coming up the stone stair, she stood at the door of the little chamber, hiding her face, her dark hair covered by a white kerchief that fell over a tunic of bright colours which reached down to her slipped feet.

"Thou hast been careful for us with all this care," the prophet said. "What is to be done for thee? Shall I ask a favour of the king for thee, or from the captain of his fighting-men?"

Elisha wished to make her some return for her kindness, and thought that she might like to see her husband raised from the life of a village farmer to be an officer in the king's army.

"I wish to dwell among mine own people," she replied simply, meaning that she would rather live where her tribe lived; and she turned away and left them.

When she was gone Elisha asked his servant if there was nothing he could do for her; and the man answered that she had no son. Gehazi knew it was the dearest wish of every Syrian woman to have a son, and that the Shunammite's heart longed for one.

"Call her," said Elisha again; and the woman in her bright tunic, bound about her waist with a silken scarf, again stood outside the door hiding her face. And Elisha told her that the time would surely come when she would hold a little son in her arms. The woman replied in a low voice,—

"Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not mock me."

But Elisha said it would be so; and saddling his ass he rode away, with Gehazi following after him.

But the prophet's word came true, and the Shunammite's heart leaped with joy as she nursed her little babe. Years passed, and the courtyard echoed with the shouts of the merry child, whose bare feet pattered all day about the sunny square, scaring the gray doves up to the housetop. Holding by his mother's hand, he went up the stairs to the little chamber on the wall, where the vine spread its broad leaves; and there he saw the table and the little bed, the red jar of water and the cakes of bread waiting for the prophet of God. And when he was five years old, with ruddy cheeks and soft hair, he was beautiful as an angel of God.

Now one day, in the hot harvest weather, the little fellow ran away from the house down to the field where his father and the reapers were at work; and he ran to and fro in the hot morning sun, sometimes chasing the bright butterflies, sometimes following the men as they cut down the grain with their sharp sickles.

But after a while he came to his father, calling, "O my head, my head!" for he had got sunstroke with the great heat. At once the old farmer bade one of his men carry the boy to his mother; and he lay on her knee in a darkened room, crying out in an agony of pain and thirst, while she tried as best she could to relieve his suffering. But by noon all was still, and the stricken mother carried his body up to the little chamber and laid it on the prophet's bed, and going out gently closed the door. Her heart was like lead as she went down the steps to her own room, for all the light seemed to have gone out of her world, and now what was she to do?

Calling her husband up from the fields, the Shunammite woman asked him to

send a servant to her with an ass, that she might ride to Elisha at Carmel and return again. The father did not know what had happened to his boy, and asked why she wished to go that day, as it was neither new moon nor Sabbath, her usual times for taking such a journey.

"It is well!" was all her reply, for her heart was crushed, and she had no words to utter. So the ass was saddled, and she said to her servant,—

"Go forward; and do not slacken the riding unless I tell thee."

Then they went out of the village at a quick pace, and along the plain, among yellow harvest-fields, and through the little streams, and over the Kishon River, and up into the wooded gorge leading to the prophet's home on the green mount of Carmel.

"Yonder is the Shunammite woman; run and meet her," exclaimed Elisha to his servant, shading his eyes from the sun with his hand, as he looked and saw her yet afar off, riding in haste. Gehazi ran as he was told, and when they met he asked her in an anxious voice,—

"Is it well with thee? Is it well with thy husband? Is it well with the child?"

"It is well," she answered, for a mother's heart is strange at such a time; and she rode forward in silence until she came to Elisha standing at his house door. Getting off the ass, she threw herself down before the prophet, and holding his feet, lay there with her face to the ground, saying nothing.

Gehazi came forward to raise her.

"Let her alone," Elisha said, looking at the grief-stricken figure at his feet. "Her soul is vexed within her, and God hath hid the matter from me, and hath not told me."

When she heard these words she found her voice, and murmured, with her face to the ground,—

"Did I ask a son of my lord? and did I not say, 'Do not deceive me'?" Then her tears fell fast. Elisha understood her at once.

"Gird up thy tunic with thy belt," he said, speaking to Gehazi, "and take my

staff, and go. Greet no man by the way, and answer no man's greeting; but lay it on the face of the child," handing him his staff as he spoke. And the man started at once to run down the path from the village.

"As God liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," the mother murmured at the prophet's feet.

She would not be content with a servant; she must have the prophet himself. And when she rode away Elisha was with her, going back again on the long ride of sixteen miles which she had scarcely noticed, so loving was her mother's heart.

When they drew near the village of Shunem, Gehazi came out to meet them.

"The child is not awake," he said; but he got no answer.

Elisha went up alone to the little chamber, and there lay the beautiful child, still and quiet upon the bed. And the old man shut the door and prayed to God for him, and stretched himself upon the child, hand to hand, eye to eye, mouth to mouth, until the child grew warm, and showing signs of life, opened his eyes. Then the prophet called to his servant to bring the Shunammite woman. She needed no calling. Her foot was on the stair while he yet spoke, so quick is a mother's heart, and she stood at the door of the little room, as she had often stood before, gazing, but afraid to enter.

"Take up thy son," the prophet said.

A glance was enough. One step and she fell half fainting at Elisha's feet, pouring out her soul in thanks to God and to the man of God. Turning to her boy, she gathered him up tenderly in her arms and bore him down the stairs to her own room in the house below. And thus was her boy restored to her alive.

A LITTLE JEWISH MAID.

Ben-hadad, the dark-eyed King of Syria, could no longer leap into his chariot and drive his swift horses through the fields as he used to do. He could not draw

the bow of steel or fling the heavy spear as far or as straight as the young men of his tribe, for he was getting old; and he had given up going with his warriors on their fighting across the Jordan, leaving it to his younger chieftains.

His home was in the beautiful town of Damascus, set in a land so rich and green with tapering trees, vineyards, and fields of grass, and watered with such delightful streams, that the Arabs, coming on their camels from the yellow sands of the hot desert, cried out, when they saw its white walls hung with green creepers, that it shone "like a handful of pearls in a green cup."

He ruled the tribes of Syria from that walled city, and in the spring-time of the year his chiefs gathered the young warriors to make up their minds where they should go to fight and plunder. Among the chiefs was Naaman the Syrian, a young man who led them out to battle when the king could not go, and had several times beaten their foes. Sitting among his chiefs, with his royal spear in his hand, a band of gold round his brow, and rings of gold on his arms and legs, the old king talked with them about fighting the men of Israel, and gave them their orders; and best of all his warriors the king loved Naaman the Syrian.

Now when Naaman blew the king's horns and beat the king's drums up and down the country, calling the young men of the tribes for a raid across the Jordan, it was either to steal cattle and corn, or to capture slaves; and boys and girls were the slaves they liked best.

One day, when he returned from one of these slave-raids, Naaman brought back with him a little Jewish maid; and she looked so pretty with her dark eyes and ruddy cheeks that he gave her as a present to his Syrian wife, to wait upon her and run her messages. When her mistress washed her hands, the little maid held the basin on bended knee. When she dressed her dark hair, she held the comb and the oil, and the little pots of yellow dye for her nails and the black paint for her eyebrows. When she went out, this little maid went also, in a little dress of scarlet, with a white kerchief on her dark head.

She learnt to love her mistress very much; and was sorry for her master, for he was troubled with the terrible sickness of leprosy, and she often wished he could be made well. One day she sighed, and said to her mistress,—

"Oh, I would to God that my master were with our prophet in Samaria! then he would get better of his leprosy."

She believed with all her heart that Elisha the prophet, like a clever doctor, could do something for him.

Now what she had said was told to Naaman, who told it to the king; and as they had both heard about Elisha, the wild prophet of Israel, the king told his favourite chief to go and see the wonderful man. And he also wrote a letter to Joram, the King of Israel, and gave it to Naaman to deliver; and this is what he wrote:—

"When this letter comes to thee, O King Joram, it is to tell thee that I have sent Naaman, my servant, for thee to heal him of his leprosy."

Naaman folded the letter in his tunic, and filling a few small bags with silver and gold, and rolling up some bundles of new clothing, he put them into the wide saddle-bags of his camels as presents for the King of Israel. Then stepping into his chariot, he drove down the river valley, with his men clattering after him, and up the hills to Samaria on the watch-hill, where he delivered the letter.

Naaman at the house of Elisha.
Naaman at the house of Elisha.

The King of Israel read it, and his chiefs saw that he was much troubled. Seizing his white tunic with both hands, he tore it from neck to hem—a sign of great grief—saying bitterly that *he* was not able to heal people of leprosy, and that the powerful King of Syria was only seeking another cause to quarrel with him. What kings say and what kings do many tongues tell, and Elisha the prophet, who had a house in white-walled Samaria, heard about the king's grief, and sent his servant Gehazi to give him a message,—

"Why do you rend your clothes? Send the man to me!"

The king was delighted, and soon Naaman's chariot and horses, his armed guards and his brown camels, were standing at the door of the prophet's house. But only Gehazi appeared in answer to the captain's call.

"Go," he said to the proud Syrian chief—"go and wash thyself seven times in the river Jordan, and thou shalt be healed, and be clean of thy leprosy."

This was a message from his master Elisha, who was not coming out to see the great captain! The Syrian chief was filled with anger at the man who dared to send him away from the prophet's door as if he were a beggar, and he exclaimed,
—

"I thought he would surely come out to see me, and stand and call on his God, and wave his hand over the place and heal me. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them and be clean?"

Springing into his chariot, he grasped the reins, and shook them as he brought his whip fiercely down on the horses' backs, causing them to leap forward from the door. The horses galloped swiftly through the narrow streets, and out by the gate in the city wall, and down the road to the plain, the guards and servants of the great captain following after him as quickly as they could. Naaman considered that he had been mocked by this foreign prophet, and was galloping back to Syria as quickly as he could.

But horses cannot gallop for ever, however angry their masters may be; and when at length they came to a walking pace, Naaman began to talk with his

friends about the insult he had received from the rude old prophet. Why should *he* bathe in the Jordan River, where the water was clay-white and often muddy, when he had his own rivers of Abana the golden and Pharpar the sweet, brimming with the finest water in the world? His friends did not answer him in his wrath; but they soon reached the ford of crossing, and if he would not bathe in the Jordan, he would have to ride through it, for there was no bridge. Then one of his friends gave him this piece of very good advice.

"My father," he said, "if the prophet had told thee to do some hard thing, thou wouldst have done it. How much more shouldst thou obey him when what he commands is such a little thing as this?"

Naaman's rage had passed off with the lashing of his horses and his furious driving, but his terrible leprosy remained. Was he going back to his master with the disease still upon him, to tell him that he had not done what the prophet had told him because it was too easy? There was the white river rushing past at his feet. To ride so far and then refuse to wash would seem very foolish; so he changed his mind, and stopping his chariot at the water's edge, went into the stream and bathed, and to his surprise and delight was at once healed of his leprosy, so that his skin became like that of a little child.

It was with a changed heart that he turned his horses' heads and drove slowly back out of the valley, and up the road to the hills down which he had just come clattering in his anger. When next he stood at the door of the prophet's little house all the pride was gone out of him.

"Now I know," he said to the prophet, "that there is no God in all the world but in Israel. I pray thee to take a present from thy servant."

Elisha stood before him in worn cloak and sandals, his head covered with a striped kerchief, his eyes bright and piercing. The camels were there, laden with presents in their saddle-bags.

"As God liveth, before whom I stand," exclaimed the old man, "I will take nothing."

Gold and silver, fine clothing, sweet spices, scented oils, had no real value for him. They were only a few of the many things he could quite well do without. This Syrian chief had obeyed what was really the command of the living God, and that was much more important. The Syrian pressed him to take something,

but the poor prophet would have nothing. Naaman then asked leave to carry away two mule loads of earth from Samaria, saying that he would never again offer sacrifice to idols after the manner of his own people, but would sacrifice to God only.

Again Naaman shook the reins and cracked his whip as the horses sprang forward with the light chariot, the wooden wheels clattering on the stones. Outside the city walls his servants scraped the earth together until they had filled two mule-sacks, and then the small band of Syrians, shouldering their spears, set out on the homeward road.

Soon the eyes of the Syrian drivers saw the green palm-trees, the spires of glittering brass, and the white walls of Damascus. They were back again in their own country, bringing no camel-loads of plunder, no droves of stolen cattle, no chains of weeping slaves—only two sacks of earth from Samaria, and a chief with a healthy body and a grateful heart. If his wife was glad to see him, so also was the little Jewish maid; and we need not doubt that she would not be much longer a slave, but free—set free as a sign that Naaman the Syrian had a grateful heart for his little friend who had sent him to be healed by the prophet of Israel.

THE END.

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