

Little-Known Women of the Bible

BY EVELEEN HARRISON

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To
Some well-beloved women
little known by the world today,
in whose company we are always at our best,
whose friendship has been a benediction
in my life and in the lives of others,
this book is dedicated.

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Foreword

THESE sketches of some of the little-known women of the Bible are more than portraits, more than little journeys into the country and times of these famous women, they are moving pictures of dramatic moments in their lives in which their vibrant voices tell the story.

Many will read this book--some for instruction, some for its inspiring materials for mystery plays and pageants--and all will be grateful to the author for its beauty and its inescapable quality of reality.

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LEAH

THE UNWANTED WIFE WHO BECAME THE MOTHER OF ISRAEL'S TRIBES

THE community was in a bustle of preparation; joy and gaiety filled the air. Young people with laughter and song carried garlands of spring flowers to decorate for a feast; boys and girls ran back and forth from house to house in the village with parcels and messages; servants arrived at the home of the head tribesman, Laban, with fruit, vegetables, skins of milk, jars of water, bottles of special wine kept for great occasions, poultry, game, and the prepared meat of lambs and kids. A holiday, a festival of importance, was to take place; the festival dear to the heart of all Orientals, a wedding feast, for "to make a feast," says Geikie, was the ordinary way to speak of celebrating a marriage.

Seven days the feast would last. All preparations must be made in advance as no work, except the absolutely necessary, could be done during the week of the festival. The whole community, dressed in wedding garments, would devote themselves to singing, dancing, visiting, eating and drinking.

The air tingled with gladness, for this wedding was the climax of a romance of true love. Rachel, the youngest daughter of Laban, head of the community, was to be married to her cousin Jacob from the far-away land of Canaan.

One morning, seven years prior to the time of this marriage feast, a tired, lonely traveler stopped at a well on the edge of a village in Paden-Aram to ask his way. A group of shepherds stood around waiting to water their flocks of sheep.

"Do you know Laban the son of Nahor?" inquired the stranger.

"We know him well, and here comes his daughter Rachel with his sheep," said the shepherds.

Down the road, dressed in gay Oriental colors, appeared a young girl, the spring sunshine encircling her head, promise of real beauty in her radiant face. Quickly the traveler walked to meet her, and bowed to the ground in greeting. "I am Jacob, son of Isaac and his wife Rebekah, your father's sister; my mother has sent me to visit your father."

"Son of my Aunt Rebekah? Then we are cousins. Wait until the sheep

are watered, and I will run and call my father that he may make you welcome."

With Eastern hospitality Laban met Jacob half way, threw his arms around him and gave the kiss of peace.

"Welcome, my nephew. My home shall be your home, for my sister's people are my people."

A month later Laban and Jacob had a business talk.

"Just because my sister is your mother there is no reason why you should work on my farm without pay; tell me what you would like for wages?"

Without a moment's hesitation came Jacob's answer.

"I will serve you seven years for the hand of your younger daughter Rachel."

Laban considered the offer. Seven years of work in place of the usual marriage portion. He would gain a good workman and, what suited him well, he did not have to pay out any money. Laban was miserly.

"It is better that I give her to thee, her cousin, than to any other man," he replied craftily.

"If you stay and work for me seven years, Rachel shall be your wife." Seven years! But to the lover they seemed like seven days because of his great love for Rachel.

The marriage of a daughter was always arranged by her father, the head of the family. The girl was not consulted, and had no choice in the matter of a husband. Sometimes she was promised in marriage the day she was born. When his plans were made, the father simply told his daughter that on a certain day she would be given to the man he had selected. Often the bride did not meet her bridegroom until the wedding feast.

It was different with Jacob and Rachel. For seven years he lived with his cousins, and it was impossible that Rachel could remain ignorant of the business agreement that she was his promised wife. Glances of love, words of understanding surely passed between them, for Rachel returned in full the love of her cousin Jacob.

Even the community must have known about the seven years contract--gossips find a way to whisper secrets--so the wedding was looked forward to as a certainty. Now, the seven years finished, plans for carrying out the contract came to a head.

Laban's house, the center of the village life, was decorated for the festival. Gifts from the bridegroom and relatives arrived. Final touches were made to the wedding dress. Of course, the little bride remained in seclusion; she could not be seen by her bridegroom except heavily veiled from head to foot, until after the marriage.

Two daughters had Laban, Leah and Rachel. The Bible story tells us "Leah was tender eyed," but Rachel was very beautiful. Perhaps Leah had a cast in her eye or suffered from some kind of eye trouble common in the East; apparently she had not the charm of her younger sister.

It is possible that Leah, as well as Rachel, might have fallen in love with their handsome young cousin, but Jacob only had eyes for Rachel.

Often during the seven years, Leah must have wondered why her father did not arrange a marriage for her, as she was the elder daughter; but he was a stern man and his children dared not question him. The law gave a father such absolute command over his family that he could even sell his children into slavery if they refused to obey him. It was an unhappy time in the life of a proud girl like Leah, illustrated by the old proverb, "The world was given to men, and tears to women."

Rachel's wedding had to be on a Wednesday according to custom, because she was a virgin; widows were married on Friday. The month of March was the favored time for festivals, as it opened the spring season when flowers carpeted the ground; roses of Sharon and lilies of the valley perfumed the air, and, as the Hebrew poet sang, "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come." And Jacob called to his bride, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

As the evening shadows fell, the bride was dressed. Perfumed hair flowed over her shoulders, a crown of myrtle woven into a wreath was on her head and silver ornaments on her forehead. The wedding dress was made of pure white embroidery, and she glittered with all the family jewels as well as with the special gifts of the bridegroom, while exquisite odors of myrrh, aloes and cassia floated around her wedding garments.

A peculiar girdle, called the *attrie*, was always worn by a bride; and over all the wedding finery a veil, the veil of betrothal, heavily embroidered, covered her so completely that she was practically invisible. This veil might not be lifted by her husband until after she had entered his house or tent as his wife; it was a symbol of the

wife's subjection to her husband and carried out the Oriental idea of seclusion of women, which was so strict that if a married woman went out on the street with her head uncovered it was considered a just cause for divorce. Strange to say the orthodox gift of a bride to her groom was a shroud! Twice a year he had to wear it, on New Year's day and on the Day of Atonement.

Thus, in all her bridal splendor, Jacob's wife awaited him in her father's house.

And now accompanied by the music of flutes, and by the singing of male voices and the sound of dancing feet, the procession of the bridegroom swept up the road; in the center the bridegroom, adorned, anointed, attended by his groomsmen, "sons of the bride chamber."

Flaring torches lit up the twilight, while neighbors gathered on the wayside with shouts of welcome.

From the house of Laban a train of young maidens, carrying lighted lamps, advanced to meet them, in the lead the bridesmaids, dancing and singing a greeting to the bride, an old song from the Talmud:

"Her eyelids are not stained with blue
Her red cheeks are her own
Her hair hangs waving as it grew
Her grace was wealth alone."

The most important figure in the celebration, the girl bride, never took part in the first day of the marriage feast. In a separate room, surrounded by her maidens, shrouded by her betrothal veil, she did not appear until it was time to conduct her to the tent of the bridegroom.

"Tenting the bride," as it was called, the legal part of the wedding, giving her into the care of her husband, constituted marriage. No religious ceremony was considered necessary.

Led by her father, followed by her maidens singing and dancing, the bride arrived at the door of her new home, where her groom stood waiting.

Laban placed the hand of his daughter in the hand of Jacob and together they entered the door of their new life, closing the door of the past.

And now the husband might take the veil off his bride and throw it over his own shoulder, a symbol illustrating the marriage bond, for the government of her life shall be upon his shoulder.

Thus, in the presence of all the community Jacob accepted his wife from the hands of her father Laban.

"And ... in the morning, behold it was Leah."

Tragedy lay hidden behind those words. Not until the veil was lifted did Jacob realize the trick Laban had played. Years before Jacob had deceived his own father, Isaac, now he too was deceived by his father-in-law, Laban.

What a scene of grief! Leah's humiliation; Jacob's indignation; and in her lonely room at home Rachel weeping over the downfall of her love dream. Three people made desperately unhappy in the midst of the festival.

A stormy scene ensued between Laban and Jacob in the morning. "What is this thou hast done to me?" demanded the angry bridegroom.

"Did I not serve seven years faithfully for Rachel whom I love?"

Laban had his oily excuse ready. "It must not be so done in our own country, to give the younger before the first-born; now, fulfil Leah's week, the seven days of the feast due to the bride, and then I will give you Rachel, if you promise to serve me yet another seven years."

So, at the end of the wedding feast Jacob was again married, this time to the girl he loved. Two sisters married to the same man within a few days!

When Moses drew up the laws for the rebirth of the Hebrew nation, he condemned the marriage of sisters to the same man, but no such law existed in the early days of their history.

Laban cared not at all that both his daughters must have been consumed with jealousy; both loved Jacob, only one was loved by him.

"Is it a matter of small thought to you that thou hast taken away my husband?" Leah asked Rachel reproachfully, for Jacob always put Rachel first in his dealings with them.

Leah was a woman of strong spiritual insight; she named her first son Reuben, which means "the son of vision." His birth was a great

consolation to the unwanted wife, for now had God seen her loneliness and sent her the gift of being the mother of the first-born son. Each son born raised the wife to a higher place in the home and in the community; so Leah's six sons brought her untold comfort and restored self-respect. How she would have rejoiced to foresee the honors bestowed on the descendants of three of her sons. The first tribe of Israel, named for Reuben her first born; the priesthood of the nation chosen from the descendants of Levi, her third son, and Judas, her fourth son, a direct ancestor of David, in whose line was born Jesus the Messiah, the Son of David. Truly may we call Leah "Mother of men from the Lord."

Jacob always made quite plain his preference for Rachel. It was her son Joseph he selected as his favorite. All through the hard journey back to Canaan, Rachel's comfort and safety were considered above her sister's. Afraid that Esau might want to fight him, on the return home, Jacob placed Rachel and her family in the rear of the caravan, the place of safety, while Leah and her children and servants were put in front.

A tremendous undertaking, that journey across the hot desert. Men, women and children on camels; shepherds herding huge flocks of sheep; asses carrying water, food, tents; an advance guard of young men riding in front to ward off robbers and wild beasts. Only ten miles a day was possible with such an unwieldy caravan.

At sunset, when Jacob put his staff in the ground it was the signal to halt for the night, pitch the tents, unload the camels, build fires, while the sun dropped below the horizon and the moon flooded the desert until it looked like a sea of silver. Stories, songs, dances around the camp fires, before they burnt low, and then the eternal quiet of the desert enfolded the travelers in sleep.

"Leah held the key to Jacob's house; Rachel, the key to his heart," one writer skilfully sums up the difference between the two sisters. Rachel the beloved wife died on the journey, but Leah lived long after the settlement in Canaan, surrounded by her six sons, and content in their love.

Bible Reference: LEAH

Genesis Chapter 29.
Genesis 30:20.
Genesis 33:1, 2.
Genesis 35:23.

MIRIAM

THE TALENTED DAUGHTER OF A WISE MOTHER WHO SAVED THE LIFE OF THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR OF ISRAEL

A LITTLE maiden sat on the bank of the river Nile, peeping through a screen of bulrushes to watch over a baby cradled in a basket boat floating on the water. Thus we are introduced to a talented family in the first of the three dramatic scenes in which Miriam played the leading role.

Miriam, recognized as the first of the intellectual women of the Hebrew race, was a musician, a prophetess, and a poet. The eldest of a gifted family, which included Moses, the emancipator of the race, and Aaron who became the first High Priest.

For nearly four hundred years, the Children of Israel had been held in continuous slavery by the Pharaohs of Egypt. Living in huts, crushed in spirit, degraded under the hands of cruel masters, and hopeless with longing for their own country. Almost daily a new burden was laid upon their bent shoulders by the Pharaoh of the oppression. One night Miriam's father entered his hut, weary from the toil of the day and overcome by the cruelty of a new law which struck at the heart of the Hebrew race. "A command by that wicked Pharaoh: every new born son of our people shall be put to death!"

With a cry of anguish, Jochebed, one of the great mothers of Israel, clasped her three months old baby to her breast. "With my own life will I guard my son," she cried. "Only over my dead body shall they take him."

The problem of how to save her baby was uppermost in the mind of the grief-stricken mother all night. A daring plan occurred to her. She must place the baby where they wouldn't think of looking for him. As dawn colored the hill tops, the mother called Miriam in a whisper, and together they crept down to the river carrying the baby. Papyrus stems lent themselves to the deft, eager fingers of the woman and her daughter; and through the use of bitumen and pitch, they made a basket-cradle that would float. They lined it with a soft lamb's skin. Then, swaddled, fed and rocked to sleep, the baby was tucked into the warm basket-boat. Mother and daughter carried it to the water's edge and hid it among the rushes.

"Thou, little sister, shalt watch over your brother while I keep guard in the house," was the mother's charge to her little girl.

Even as a young girl Miriam showed characteristics of leadership. Her tact, self-control and obedience to her trust saved her brother's life. Down the windings of the river one day came a boat, carrying the Princess Thermuthis, daughter of the wicked Pharaoh, and her maidens who had come to bathe. As they played in the water they discovered the basket in which was cradled the baby. As the basket was opened at the feet of the Princess, Miriam creeping close heard the maidens speak of a nurse. "She might take our baby for her own and save him," was the thought which sprang into the quick mind of the sister. A nurse needed for the baby, promptly Miriam thought of her mother, and slipping from the bushes she bowed to the ground at the feet of the Princess. "A nurse, most gracious one! Shall I bring you a nurse for the baby?"

What a day of gladness! Miriam, breathless with running, pushed open the door of their hut, and gasped out the marvelous news: "The Princess has found our baby. She has sent for you to act as his nurse."

So for three years, the time allowed before a child was weaned, Jochebed had supreme charge of her son Moses, the name given him by the Princess; the best time in his life in which to plant seeds for building character. His babyhood hers, what mattered the training of others?

Meanwhile the little sister Miriam spent her girlhood and young womanhood under the shadow of deeper suffering and heavier burden bearing. Her only joy came when Moses visited his family and showed them his beautiful clothes and told them stories of the splendor at the palace and of his life with his fairy godmother, the Princess, who had him taught in all the learning of the Egyptians.

Their father, in turn, told tales of the adventures and glories of the Hebrew race, and kept alive in their hearts faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Even after four hundred years of slavery, his people still believed that some day God would send them a deliverer who would lead them back to the promised land.

What a grief to his family when it was known that Moses had struck and killed one of the cruel overseers who was beating to death a Hebrew slave, and had fled for his life into the wilderness.

Jewish history reports that Miriam married Hur, one of the fine men of Israel, later to become a member of the wilderness government. To Miriam the wise mother turned for comfort.

Labor troubles, caused by the unjust oppression of the new Pharaoh, back-breaking work, whippings for small offences and death for

disobedience, filled the minds of the proud Israelites with thoughts of revenge and plots to escape. Had God forgotten to send them a deliverer? In the meantime Moses, who had cared for the sheep of Jethro in the land of Midian, had married Jethro's daughter, and had gone through the mysterious experience of the burning bush, now, once more stood at the door of his home, armed with the sacred rod, the sign from God of his great commission as the deliverer of his race.

Swiftly, then, came the end of the long years of waiting. Miriam entered eagerly into the secret conferences, stealing out at night with Moses and Aaron to meet the elders in lonely places. She gathered the women around her in groups, sang to them the songs of ancient Israel to stimulate their trembling hearts, and helped them to plan for the long desert journey. Night after night Miriam listened to the graphic account of her brother's visits to Pharaoh: his scorn at their request to allow their people freedom. "Who is your Lord that I should obey his voice, I know not your God, neither will I let Israel go!" replied Pharaoh with a laugh of mockery. Then, the dramatic series of ten plagues; finally the terrible death sentence in every Egyptian home; the bitter cry of the mothers "Woe, woe, my first born son is dead!" and at last the hurried command from the palace: "Go! Go, get ye gone from my land forever."

The details of the great exodus filled the hands of Moses and Aaron, so Miriam took charge of the needs of the family. She prepared the first Passover supper. It was eaten in haste by the family, ready dressed for the journey, standing around the table, before they hastily gathered up their belongings and followed Miriam and their deliverer in the midnight escape to freedom.

What a pilgrimage! That great exodus of thousands of individuals in the dead of night.

Haste was the first thought of the leaders, for well they knew the Pharaoh would be terrible in his revenge once he left the death-bed of his first-born son, his heir. Yet, burdened with children, the lame, the sick, old people, mothers with child, cattle, household goods, the caravan could only travel as fast as its weakest member. But their souls were alive with hope. Free at last! Slavery gone forever. Before them the vision of the promised land.

Day by day, as the miles lengthened between the Israelites and the land of their former slavery the pilgrims gained confidence. Songs of praise led by Miriam strengthened the hearts of the multitude, until they camped on the shores of the Red Sea, perfect safety beckoning them across the water.

Then came tragedy.

One morning there appeared a cloud on the horizon. Miriam, Moses and Aaron anxiously talked about what it meant; was it a mirage or a gathering storm? Shading their eyes with trembling hands they watched the cloud grow bigger, take form and color; and when in the far distance echoed a bugle of war, the awful truth faced them-- Pharaoh was coming to avenge the death of his son; his captains with chariots and horses were galloping down upon them.

The Israelites had been caught in a vise. Before them lay the Red Sea, behind them the swords of the Egyptians; dungeons and merciless torture for the men and degradation for the women. An agonizing cry of terror swept through the air. "Look! see what you have brought us to!" the elders screamed at Moses; "You are responsible!"

"Fear not," was his quiet answer. "The Lord will fight for us; and you will yet live in peace and safety."

With the sacred rod held on high, straight out into the sea walked the fearless deliverer, calling to the people: "Trust God, and follow me."

Into the sea! Was he leading them to certain death beneath the waves? The people hesitated. But under the guiding hand of God a strong east wind blew with terrific force and the waters rolled back, showing a ford, a safe passage for man and beast leading to the other shore.

Inspired by Moses, Aaron and Miriam led the frightened multitude; the people crowding and pushing, almost trampling each other in frantic haste, and glancing back in terror at the army of Pharaoh now visible in the twilight. Miriam helping the mothers with their children, comforting crying little ones, encouraging the sick and helpless. All night it took the Children of Israel to cross the ford. Then, in the darkest hour before the dawn, when the last fugitive touched dry ground, the wind died down, the dark waters rolled back and the ford through which they had walked was covered from sight. As the Egyptians tried to follow they were drowned in the depths of the sea. The dread army of Pharaoh disappeared, and between the Israelites, and the land of Egypt, there flowed a sea of separation, dividing the old life of slavery, from the new life of freedom.

Pharaoh had said: "I will overtake, my hand shall destroy!"

The Israelites sang: "Thou, O God, didst blow with thy wind. . . . And the sea covered them."

And the wreck of the Egyptian army was washed up by the waves at their feet.

A wild passion of joy swept the souls of the pilgrims. "A festival of freedom will we have, and Miriam will make a song of triumph," declared the elders.

The development of the art of music and the use of Egyptian instruments were among the many gifts learned by the Hebrews in Egypt. In composing her hymn of rejoicing, one of the finest specimens of Hebrew poetry, Miriam took her place down the ages in the front rank of the world's great poets.

Past, present and future are woven together in this song of grandeur. The triumphal procession was divided into two bands: Miriam and her maidens on one side, with Moses, Aaron and the men singing the male chorus. All singing was responsive, sung to the music of timbrels and cymbals.

Moses and the men: *The past.*

"Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the
gods,
Glorious in holiness, fearful in praise, doing
wonders.
Thou hast led forth the people which thou
hast redeemed."

Miriam and the girls: *The present.*

"The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my
salvation: he is my God and I will prepare him an
habitation: my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Moses and the men: *The future.*

"Thou shalt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of
thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which thou hast
made for thee to dwell in."

Miriam and the girls:

"Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed
gloriously;
The horse and his rider hath he thrown into
the sea."

The Irish poet, Thomas Moore, has paraphrased in exquisite language Miriam's poetic hymn:

Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea;
Jehovah has triumphed, his people are free.

Sing, for the pride of the tyrant is broken;
His chariots and horsemen all splendid and brave,
How vain was their hastening, the Lord hath but spoken
And chariots and horsemen are sunk in the waves.
Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt's dark sea;
Jehovah has triumphed, his people are free.

Free from the Egypt of their bondage, up and down the sea shore sang and danced the pilgrims with grateful hearts. The days to come might bring trials and suffering; but today was dedicated to thanksgiving and joy, for, "Jehovah had triumphed; his people were free."

On they journeyed, these people freed from Egypt's slavery. Arriving at the foot of Mount Sinai, the wanderers settled down for a long rest. Huts were built from tree branches, the women rejoiced in their home-keeping, the shepherds found pasture for the flocks, and the peace of God brooded over the encampment.

The chief architect, chosen by Moses to build the wilderness Tabernacle, was Bezaleel, the grandson of Miriam; he had inherited the artistic skill of his grandmother, and it was his designs that were taken for the celebrated breast plate of the high priest, the golden altar, and also the Ark of the Covenant. Into his hands poured the gifts of the people until he was compelled to stop them. "You bring too much, more than enough for all the work of the Tabernacle."

Miriam had her part in this beautiful work; she directed the women as "they did spin with their hands both purple, scarlet and fine linen" for the fine hangings and the vestments of the priests, her brother Aaron and her nephews, to whom was given charge of the Tabernacle.

The third dramatic scene in the life of Miriam came in her old age. Forty years the Israelites had lived in the wilderness. Even great leaders are human and share with us the frailties of our nature, and the possibility of yielding to temptation. Moses gave way to disobedience and anger; Aaron, to rebellion; and Miriam, to ambition and jealousy.

The new nation had reached a critical time in its history. The people were near the borders of Palestine, but were not yet ready to enter the promised land because they were still an undisciplined nation. Full of personal ambitions, the people, if a revolt occurred, would be divided in their loyalties. Perhaps civil war would ensue.

All her life Miriam had shared the confidence of her brothers; they had given her a voice in the plans for the nation, and it was no wonder she was proud of the position she had attained in the sight of

the people. One day Miriam and Aaron held a secret conference. They felt chosen equally with Moses to lead the nation, and had become jealous of his supreme authority. They longed for greater recognition and for more power in the government. "Hath the Lord spoken only through Moses?" was the subject of their conference, "Hath he not spoken also through us?"

The story of their punishment is graphically told in the book of Numbers. God commanded Moses that he, Aaron and Miriam should stand at the door of the Tabernacle, and there a voice from the pillar of cloud called Miriam and Aaron away from Moses and said to them: "Were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses who is faithful in all my house? I the Lord will make myself known to him, and will speak to him mouth to mouth." The voice stopped. The cloud lifted. Behold Miriam was a leper, as white as snow, in punishment for her disloyalty.

With a look of horror at his sister's leprous condition, Aaron threw himself on his knees and cried to Moses: "I beseech thee lay not this sin on us! We have done foolishly, we have sinned," thus confessing his part in their secret rebellion. So Moses begged for her forgiveness: "Heal her, O God, I pray." But the lesson must be learned not only by Miriam but by all the people who might be tempted to rebel. For seven days Miriam was shut out from the camp; seven days in which to meditate in loneliness the pride that caused her fall.

Perhaps it was then that Miriam resigned all share in the leadership she had loved too well. Perhaps her health never recovered from the shock to her nervous system. Only once more is her name mentioned in history, when we read of her death and burial at Kadesh.

Miriam was a forerunner of many other splendidly equipped women down through the ages who have given themselves without measure for the betterment of humanity. A capable leader, poet, prophetess; but always remembered best as a devoted daughter, and as a faithful sister to her brothers Moses and Aaron.

Bible Reference: MIRIAM

Exodus 2:1-15.

Exodus 14:10-31.

Exodus 15:1-22.

Exodus 35:30-35.

Numbers 12:1-16.

Numbers 20:1.

DEBORAH

THE JEANNE D'ARC OF THE HEBREWS

I WILL go! I will go! But not a man will be given the honor of the day; a woman will receive the greater glory, because on a woman you have leaned for strength of heart.

So spoke Deborah, judge, prophetess, leader; the only woman in the history of the Hebrews raised to political power by consent of the people, and, centuries before the days of woman's rights, elected as judge over the nation; a high tribute to the intellect of womanhood, during an age when they were considered far inferior to men.

The supreme court of the land was in session. Not inside four walls but outdoor, on the slope of Mount Ephraim, under a spreading palm tree. This court was called "The Gateway, or Sanctuary of the Palms," and a real sanctuary it was for the frightened, unhappy people.

Judge Deborah sat on the bench, not in a flowing black robe but a dress of embroidered linen; a woman of poise and dignity, the wife of a rich land owner, a woman of fiery spirit, also a home-keeper, before she became judge of the nation.

Apparently childless, she had passed "thirty silent years" at home before going forth as a leader of men.

"No child of my body! then shall I be a mother in Israel."

Gifted with the spirit of prophecy and possessing sound common sense, the wise advice Deborah had given her neighbors in distress had been repeated in the market place and at the village well; her name became a slogan for wisdom, finally leading her to the supreme bench.

All day long, heads of families passed back and forth before her calling for justice. The court was crowded with farmers, shepherds, merchants from far and near.

"My sheep have been stolen!" cried one. "My wife and daughter have been carried away as slaves!" moaned another tearing his hair. "My home has been burned; my crops broken by the wheels of the iron chariots." "We dare not walk on our own roads by daylight; for these bandits hunt us like cattle." "Our women cannot go to the well for water without fear of being swept into captivity."

Day after day the tales of sorrow; day after day the voices in agony cried, "Save us from the robbers."

Judge Deborah listened to all with a heavy heart. It was high time to act. For twenty years King Jabin, the Canaanite, had encouraged his people to torment the Israelites. General Sisera, in command of the king's army, spent his time breaking down crops, stealing cattle, making bonfires of homes, killing men, carrying off captive the girls and women. Sisera! His name stirred Deborah's soul with righteous indignation as she visualized smoking ruins, destitute families, ravished women, motherless children.

"It shall be stopped!" declared the mother in Israel. With more daring than the men around her, she had faith to believe her beloved country might be free.

The great Handel, in his oratorio called *Deborah*, puts into her mouth a prayer for guidance--

"Immortal Lord of earth and skies,
Whose wonders all around us rise,
Whose anger when it awful glows

To swift perdition dooms Thy foes;
O grant a leader to our host
Whose name with honor we may boast;
Whose conduct may our cause maintain
And break our proud oppressor's chain."

A leader, a general for the army, to break forever the tyranny of the cruel Sisera; but, . who would undertake the heroic task?

Did "the voices" speak to Deborah, as to Jeanne d'Arc, thousands of years later?-- "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song; arise Barak, and lead thy captivity captive," just as if she repeated a mystical message given in the silence of the night watches, as she waited for guidance.

Up in the foothills of the north land, in Kadesh on Mount Naphtali, there lived a strong man called Barak; so swift of action that he was nicknamed, "The Lightning." To him Deborah decided to appeal for help.

Fleet runners were sent with a summons to call him to a council meeting. A few days later Barak bowed before the judge in her court under the palms. A fine contrast between the two, Barak and Deborah, is made by Matheson in his book. He speaks of the dauntless majesty of the woman; hot with indignation, strong in faith that right would triumph; and the man, fearful of the mighty Sisera, waiting for the inspiration to dare even the impossible.

Deborah went straight to the point. "You know the Canaanites are tormenting our people. No general has been chosen to lead our nation since the death of Joshua; but now God has spoken to my soul. You are the man He has chosen to lead the army to victory; go, at once, this very day, call together an army of ten thousand men."

Barak was startled. The amazing victories of Joshua still filled the minds of the people. A warlike hero would be needed to again arouse the nation of Israel. Hemmed in on all sides by enemies: Philistines, Phoenicians, worst of all the wicked Canaanites under Sisera, counted by tens of thousands, equipped with the newest fighting machine, the dreaded iron chariots.

"You ask me to perform a miracle!" gasped Barak. "Get together an army! Not a spear or sword in the country; our only weapons sticks with pointed spikes; our men out of training, their hearts trembling with fear; and to ask them to face a well drilled army led by nine hundred iron chariots, carrying well armed troops! What can I do?" Then looking up, Barak glimpsed the fiery scorn in the eyes of the judge, and threw down his challenge. "Alone I can do nothing, but if you will go with us to battle, we will fight to the death."

The "Jeanne d'Arc of the Hebrew race" picked up the challenge with enthusiasm, exclaiming: "I will go! I will go: But not to a man will be the honor of the day; a woman shall receive the greater glory, because on a woman you have leaned for strength of heart."

North, south, east, west, sounded the trumpet call. Runners carried the flaming torch of war from the tribes on the coast to the tribes in the hill country. Men, weary of twenty long years of cruelty and robbery, eagerly threw themselves into the line of march. Ten thousand gathered in "the high places of the field," an oval half a mile in extent on the very top of Mount Tabor, commanding the most superb outlook in Palestine and overlooking the camps of the enemy in the valley of Jezreel--called in Greek, Esdraelon--the battleground of the Hebrews through the centuries.

Standards from the various tribes of Israel waved in the air; the battle cry, "After thee, Benjamin!" echoed from hill to hill, answered by the war cries of other tribes. The best of the land had joined the army: princes carried under canopies, or riding white asses; chiefs leading eager bands of untrained men; all united by a national need against a national foe.

Under command of General Barak, recruits were drilled, swords and spears beaten into shape, plans of attack tried out; while Deborah, from her mount of vision, gazed on the immense camp of the

Canaanites carpeting the plain of Esdraelon at her feet. Line upon line they stretched; archers, spearmen at drill, war horses harnessed to the iron chariots--just as terrible then as our armed tanks in the great war--galloped over the battlefield.

How Sisera laughed to scorn the poorly armed handful of men under Barak; and guided, too, by a woman!

With a call of triumph one morning just before dawn, Deborah awoke the camp: "Arise! arise! Barak, and lead thy captivity captive; this is the day the Lord will deliver Sisera into thy hands."

The scene that followed was worthy of a great painter. On foot! No war horses! No iron chariots! No, but in every heart the spirit of their God, the inspiration of Deborah's challenge, and behind their strong right arms the courage of a righteous cause.

The "stars in their courses" did fight against Sisera that day; for the sun disappeared, the sky grew darker and darker. As his war horses galloped forth to attack, the whole artillery of heaven thundered from hill to hill; lightning flashed, dazzling the eyes of men and horses; the "earth trembled, the heavens dropped, the clouds also poured down water." A storm of hail stones, hard as bullets, rained down on man and beast. Straight into the faces of the Canaanites came the hail, blinding their sight, as with numbed fingers they tried to fit arrow to bow.

The big plain of Esdraelon, divided by a number of rivers, was turned into a sea of mud, where the heavy wheels of the iron chariots sank and stuck fast. Flashes of lightning and sharp hail stones maddened the horses; they plunged, kicked, broke the harness, overthrew their riders and galloped away. Down pelted the rain and hail; up rose the angry river, "that ancient river Kishon," overflowing its banks, sweeping to death horses and soldiers who dared to cross its pathway. Mighty princes and captains, thrown from their chariots, were buried in the rising flood of waters. The immense army of Sisera broke and fled.

"The Lord is God of the hills, but not God of the valley!" had declared the Syrians when they, too, tried to fight the Israelites, drawing them down from the hills only to be overpowered by "the God of the valley."

Barak's charge down the hill had been tremendous, for the hail which whipped the faces of the enemy, lashed the backs of the Israelites, hurling them forward to victory.

"Praise the Lord for the avenging of Israel!" cried Deborah in a passion of thanksgiving.

The proud mother of Sisera gazed from her latticed window. "Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariot? Where is his triumphal procession, returning with the spoils of war?" she asked.

Alas for that aching mother's heart. The iron chariot of her son lay rusting in a swamp, while the defeated General Sisera escaped on foot through the darkness. Three days and nights he wandered, then one evening Sisera came to a grove of trees, shading a Bedouin encampment, called "The oak of the unloading of tents."

"Friends here; I will find a hiding place, food, rest," sighed the tired man, for there was peace between his King Jabin and the Bedouin chief, Heber the Kenite. To the tent of Jael, wife of Heber, crept the defeated general, and with outstretched hands the chieftainess welcomed him.

"Turn in my lord, turn in and fear not." On a cushioned divan he sank with relief, and she covered him with a silken blanket.

"Water! I thirst. Will you give me a drink?"

"Better than water will I give thee," and opening a skin bottle, into a lordly bowl reserved for honored guests, Jael poured the creamy milk of goats.

"Stand at the door of the tent I pray thee; let no man enter," requested the general. Then, in perfect trust (had he not taken food in the tent of an Arab?), the exhausted Sisera slept.

Silently, at the tent door waited Jael, until the heavy breathing of her guest told of sound sleep. Then, grasping an iron tent nail and a heavy hammer, on tiptoe she crept across the floor and stood by the sleeper.

Before her lay her guest, but also the enemy of her friends the Israelites.

The wandering tribes of the Kenites had rendered important help and service to the Children of Israel when Moses led them to the borders of the Promised Land! In return, Moses pledged friendship with the Bedouins, and for years they had moved about the country always keeping in close touch with the new settlers.

For twenty years King Jabin had invaded the home land of the Hebrews; now, with Jael rested the power to end their sufferings.

Feeling justified, therefore, in her fearsome act to help her friends, she reached out her left hand holding the iron nail, and raised on high her strong right hand grasping the mallet and drove the tent nail home.

"At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down;
Where he bowed, there he fell down dead."

Once more the chieftainess stood at the door of her tent, while through the darkness came the sounds of an arrival. General Barak on his way home in triumph. Out to meet him went the Kenite chiefs, with shouts of rejoicing; eagerly they listened to his story of the fight as they feasted in his honor.

"But our victory is not complete," deplored Barak, "Sisera has escaped, and now he will again stir up our enemies to torment us."

Out from the shadows of the encampment stepped Jael. Lifting the flap of her tent, she called, "Come, I will show you the man you seek."

And Barak was satisfied. Head erect, he returned to meet Deborah and join in her song of triumph. "The great war of northern Palestine's independence," as Charles Foster Kent called it, had been fought and won.

A wave of gladness swept over the country. For the first time in twenty years people dared to walk openly on the roads in daylight and to sleep in their beds without fear at night.

A day of national thanksgiving was proclaimed, and a triumphal procession was organized to celebrate the victory.

Deborah, the mother in Israel, led the procession, and following proudly in her footsteps, a chorus of girls, dancing, playing on cymbals and singing the song of triumph she had composed, a glorious song of praise, one of the oldest writings in our Bible, ranking with the song of Miriam as the first poem by a woman on record. Some historians claim it is the "Marseillaise of the Hebrews."

"Hear O ye kings; give ear O ye princes;
I, even I, will sing unto the Lord;
I will sing praises to the Lord God of Israel."

The outline of the oppression is poetically recalled, the response to her call for help, enrollment of the tribes, intense scorn for the ones who refused to serve in the battle, the agony of Sisera's mother, a blessing on Jael for saving her sister women from the slavery of the

enemy; and closing with the triumph of Jehovah for His people. Wonderful, dramatic, soul stirring, this song is filled with the elemental forces of nature and the war spirit in which the author lived.

"It is a glory to womanhood," writes W. Macintosh, "that our sacred literature should have at its beginning the splendid song of Deborah."

Following Deborah and her chorus, in the procession marched Barak and his valiant captains and soldiers. Waving the banners of their tribes and guarding the spoils of war, including some of the terrible iron chariots dug out of the river Kishon, they sang the triumph of Israel.

"Awake, awake, Deborah:
Awake, awake, utter a song:

Arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive . . .
They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses
Fought against Sisera.
The river of Kishon swept them away . . .
O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.
Then were the horsehoofs broken
By the pransings of their mighty ones . . ."

With gladness of heart, the whole land of Palestine re-echoed the magnificent closing of Deborah's hymn of praise, rolling up like the swell of the ocean:

"So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord:
But let them that love him be as the sun
When he goeth forth in his might."

A grand woman, that mother in Israel: judge, leader of men. The stately palm tree under which she held court was symbolic of her character; up-pointing, aspiring to spiritual heights. Used by God as His instrument, like Jeanne d'Arc, her soul was filled with the Spirit of God.

A graphic summation of Deborah's character is given by Hight C. Moore in his *Points for Emphasis*:

Woman homekeeping: Deborah was a keeper of the home before she was Judge in the court.

Woman interpreting: Deborah was a prophetess, she spoke for God to the people.

Woman serving: She judged Israel.

Woman calling: She sent and called for Barak.
Woman directing: "Go and draw unto Tabor."
It was the plan that won victory.
Woman cooperating: Deborah went with Barak;
he needed her at the battle front.
Woman inspiring: "Up, for this is the day."
She inspired the army.
Woman triumphing: "The host of Sisera fell."
Her queenly spirit carried the day.
Woman liberating: Deborah did not stop until
Jabin was crushed, Israel free.
Woman celebrating: Deborah's song of rejoicing.
Her pæan of triumph was a poem of praise.

Bible Reference: DEBORAH

Judges Chapters 4, 5.

MICHAL

THE DAUGHTER OF A KING WHO MARRIED A SHEPHERD

THE army of King Saul was returning home in triumph after a brilliant victory over the ancient enemies, the Philistines. News of the victory was carried far in advance of the returning soldiers to the city of Jerusalem, and all the streets of the city were decorated with flags and streamers of bright colors to celebrate a national day of rejoicing. The victory had been achieved by something like a miracle, the colossal accomplishment of a young shepherd boy, a stranger to the people of Saul's city. They had never seen or heard of him until, like a swift comet streaking the sky, at one stroke he became their greatest warrior. David, a shepherd boy of Bethlehem. Now he was coming to their city.

Through the gaily decorated streets rode Saul the king, leader of the victorious army, surrounded by his bodyguard, the sun flashing on their polished helmets, swords and shields; and around them dancing maidens swinging garlands, clashing cymbals and chanting a new song of victory.

"Saul has slain his thousands," sang the maidens.

"And David his ten thousands," responded the other singers.

Up the street they came, between crowds of happy onlookers, past the children waving palms of victory, under the streamers stretched from house to house. All eyes were on the marchers, but the one they looked for eagerly was not Saul the king but David the conquering hero.

On a balcony outside the palace, the women of the court, dressed in gorgeous robes of state, had assembled to greet their king.

In the front row, the Princess Michal, youngest daughter of Saul, leaned far over the railing eager to see the young hero.

"There he is," cried one of her maids-in-waiting. "Look, your Highness, look! The young lad borne upon the shield of victory, the big shield of the giant Goliath whom he slew."

Eagerly Michal pressed forward and looked down into the street. David, carried above the heads of the soldiers on the gigantic shield, smiled up at the beautiful girl. For a moment their eyes met, then he was swept on in the procession. Her father passed, and Michal waved and smiled at him, but her heart was with David far along the line of march, and David's heart was left behind in her keeping.

"Saul has slain his thousands," chanted the crowd.

"And David his ten thousands," was the answering song of victory.

To Michal the song brought pleasure, but to her father, Saul, it held a menace. Kings in those days won and held their thrones by valor and might. The song seemed to claim David as a mightier warrior than the king. Saul had conquered the Philistines, but at what price? The victory was turning to ashes. He became terribly jealous of the popular hero, afraid the people might place him at the head of a revolution, and decided something must be done to bind David in loyalty to the royal family. Saul's throne was the stake in this game, and for such a stake he would sacrifice everything.

The laws and customs of society were in his favor. Fathers were autocrats when Saul was king; daughters only humble servants of their fathers, who shaped and fixed their lives, particularly in marriage, and absolute obedience was expected and enforced.

Saul had heard the delicious piece of gossip whispered around the palace, that the Princess Michal had fallen in love with the shepherd David.

Of course, it might have been expected, for overnight the shepherd had become the warrior of the nation, but Michal found it difficult to

conceal her love for David, and everybody knew it.

To end the threat of David's rivalry, Saul planned a trap to win him and hold him with bonds of love and duty.

King Saul summoned David to his presence.

Slim, upright, his head of auburn hair held erect, David stood before his king.

"Be valiant for me and fight the Lord's battles and, behold, I will give you for your wife my eldest daughter Merab," declared Saul.

Merab, not Michal whom he loved! David looked up at the king who held for his subjects the gift of life, or the penalty of death. Impossible to disobey the royal command.

"Who am I," replied David artfully, "and what is my life, or my father's family in Israel, that I should be son-in-law to so mighty a king?"

But Saul persisted, and the marriage was planned. Then, for some reason secret to himself, the vacillating monarch changed his mind and married his elder daughter Merab to another.

Soon again the gossips of the court were busy whispering about the true love between Michal and David, and Saul was greatly troubled, for every hour David became more popular.

The taunting chant: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands," rang in the king's ears, and flashes of jealous fire ran through his veins. Never before, the people said, had so mighty a warrior, so great a hero appeared. Never before had a shepherd boy climbed to such glamorous heights. The love which Michal felt for him was magnified a thousand times in the hearts of the people.

Saul began to think about the possibility of death in connection with this dangerous rival. It would need to be a death appearing accidental, arranged for in advance.

Once again Saul summoned David, and the slim, straight lad bowed before the throne.

Most temptingly the king baited his trap.

"David, I will give you my daughter Michal, as your wife," Saul declared, "if--" and he paused--"if you will kill one hundred Philistines and bring me proof of their death."

Such a challenge to a daring young lover; the maiden he adored to be won by his strong right arm. The risk was appalling, but the prize great, and David did not hesitate for a moment. That night, with a handful of his comrades, he set out in haste, made a surprise attack on a company of Philistines, and returned to the king with proof that he had slain double the number required by Saul.

The king was confounded. Instead of causing the death of David, he had helped him to win another victory, and in addition would be obliged to fulfill his promise, for the king, exacting obedience to his commands from the people, also obeyed his own word.

Ascending the throne and assembling his court, the king commanded the presence of his daughter Michal.

The little princess entered the stately hall of audience, and fell on her knees at the foot of the throne, fear and wonder in her heart.

Why had her father sent for her? What did he wish of her? Like a loyal subject, Michal touched the step of the throne with her forehead and waited for the command of the king.

"Michal," he said, "it is my wish that you prepare to be married at once."

To be married! To whom? A king's daughter, she dared not hope to be allowed to marry her lover, the son of a shepherd. But to be obliged to marry another man! The girl's heart quivered with fear.

"I have decided," continued her father, "to give you in marriage to David of Bethlehem, for he has fulfilled the condition which I laid upon him."

Married to David! Could it be true? Covering her face with her mantle to conceal the glorious happiness in her eyes, Michal again touched the steps of the throne with her forehead and ceremoniously withdrew from her father's presence.

So the princess married the shepherd, and they set up housekeeping in Jerusalem.

But Saul was not content. The romantic marriage of their hero was received with enthusiasm by the people of Saul's kingdom. Higher than ever they valued the national hero, now a member of the royal family, and greater than ever before in the jealous heart of the king was the menace to his throne. Forever in his ears rang the taunting song, "Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands." The boy was far too popular, too handsome, too winning, too successful.

Tortured with jealousy, the king could not rest day or night.

And now he learned the unwelcome news that in addition to winning the princess for his wife, David had also won the undying love of Saul's son Jonathan, and they had vowed eternal friendship and brotherhood.

Unable longer to conceal his jealousy, Saul decided to arrest David and condemn him to death.

Perhaps it was Jonathan who secretly sent word of the royal intention to Michal, and, knowing the character of her father, the young bride was at once on the alert to prevent the king carrying out his will.

Watching, from a hiding place on the roof of their home, that night, Michal saw the soldiers of the king gather silently in the darkness in small groups, and encircle the house. Aroused at once to David's great danger, the brave girl made plans to defy the king.

Calling David quietly to the roof, Michal pointed out to him the hiding places of the soldiers, and whispered, "If you do not save yourself tonight, you will be dead tomorrow."

With no thought of the consequences to herself, or of what her father might do when he discovered she was responsible for the escape of his intended victim, Michal's one desire was the safety of the man she loved.

At midnight, in the darkened house, a window softly opened facing on the gardens. Behind it stood Princess Michal, watching, with an aching heart, while her David slipped over the sill. Noiselessly he lowered himself by a rope made of newly spun linen, and disappeared into the night-shrouded garden. She dared not call farewell. Silent, heart-broken, with only the remembrance of the passionate embrace before the window opened, the little princess waited tensely for a cry of alarm from the soldiers. All remained quiet. Her David had escaped to safety.

With a brave spirit the princess closed the window and turned back to the silent house. There was work for her to do, her part in the escape to finish. She must delay the soldiers' search of the house to give David time to reach the hills, far from the city. There he would be safe, for those were the hills where he had played as a boy. On those hills he had cared for his father's sheep. In their caves he could hide, and the king could not hope to find him.

Michal had formed an ingenious scheme to deceive the king's guard. With trembling arms she dragged from its pedestal a large statue,

drew it into David's bedroom, lifted it on his bed, and dressed it in his sleeping-garments, with an embroidered coverlet over the feet.

The first ray of dawn brought an imperative knock at the door. Trembling but brave, Michal opened a window. An officer of her father's troops stood below, knocking on the door with the hilt of his sword.

"Who knocks?" called the princess.

"A message from the king," replied the officer.

"My lord David lies in his bed ill," Michal answered. "He cannot be disturbed. I will admit the king's messenger that he may see for himself."

Unbarring the door, the princess took the officer to David's room and, with finger on lip, pointed to the bed. There, beyond question, lay the still figure of a man. The officer gazed upon it and withdrew; calling his soldiers they marched back to the palace and reported to the king.

The king was furiously angry. In a rage, he ordered the officer back to David's house. "Bring him up on his bed, that I may slay him," Saul commanded.

Again the imperious knock at her door, and Michal, knowing that David was safely hidden in the folds of the friendly hills, accompanied the officer, and faced her angry father without flinching. He might kill her for deceiving him, but her husband was safe.

King Saul did not kill his daughter; he devised another fate for her. Michal would be allowed to live, but it would be a life of unhappiness. The king annulled her marriage to David, and gave her to Paltiel, a splendid man living in another part of the country. He learned to love the princess dearly, but he was not the love of her life; her heart remained with David.

Fourteen years passed. David always escaped the king's soldiers, and Saul was not satisfied. Never could he even catch up with the young hero and his faithful band of men. David's power grew, and he became both strong and desperate. There resulted a great battle, Saul and Jonathan were defeated and killed, and David was crowned king of Israel.

The shepherd king had never forgotten his girl bride. Calling for Abner, captain of his bodyguard, he said: "You may not see my face again until you bring to me Michal, the daughter of Saul."

Paltiel, Michal's second husband, was stricken with sorrow when Abner delivered the king's message, and Michal, though her heart was filled with joy at the knowledge that David still loved her, wept with grief for Paltiel. The crushed, faithful man followed her as far as he was allowed on the homeward way, grieving that he would look on her face no more.

How different from her expectations was Michal's return home. During the years of separation David was occupied with wars, military discipline, and the slow difficult formation of his kingdom; also he had married other wives, by whom he had children, and Michal was no longer alone in his affection; she returned as one of many women sharing his love. David the king was indeed a very different man from David the shepherd lad; the old boy and girl love could never be recaptured.

With gayness and dancing their romance had started. In singing and dancing it was drawing to a close.

After the crowning of David and his establishment in Jerusalem, his capital city, the king, always profoundly religious, decided to fulfil a vow he had made years before, that if he was victorious he would bring the sacred Ark of the Covenant, made by Moses in the wilderness, to its rightful resting place in a shrine erected in the city of God. A national day of rejoicing was proclaimed. Out from the city went a caravan of priests and soldiers to the little town of Gath-rimmon, where the Ark rested in temporary sanctuary, and back they came with it to Jerusalem.

On the shoulders of the Levites was carried the Ark, in the vanguard priests with silver trumpets heralded its approach, surrounded by an escort of thirty thousand troops. As they approached, King David met them, dressed in his purple robes of state, with maidens dancing and singing as they led the way into the decorated city. The streets re-echoed with songs of thanksgiving from the happy people lining the way. Once more the glory of the Shechinah would rest in their midst.

Carried away by the music of the silver trumpets, the songs of the multitude and the joy in his own heart, King David, "the sweet singer of Israel," cast away his robes of state, and clad in a white linen tunic, harp in hand, led the procession up the hill of Zion, dancing and singing before the Lord.

Michal, with the other women of the court looked down on the procession from the same balcony where fourteen years before she had first seen David, carried on the shield of Goliath--David, the national hero.

Now all was changed. David the king was also the husband of other women, and the disappointment and bitterness which burned in her bruised heart burst out of her control.

Forgetting that this was the day of David's great religious triumph, and the importance of the event he was celebrating; guided only by worldly consideration--for Michal was proud of her royal blood--the princess felt contempt for this simple man, singing and dancing in the public streets.

When the king returned to his palace, flushed with rejoicing that the victory of war was crowned by the religious victory of peace, Michal met him as he entered the door of his house.

"How glorious was the king of Israel today," she said, with a curl of contempt on her lips, "who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants."

With quiet dignity David answered: "It was before the Lord, which appointed me ruler over the people of Israel. Therefore will I play before the Lord."

Apparently that was the last talk they had together. In punishment for her scorn and jealousy, David banished Michal from his presence.

The daughter of Saul, whose life opened with romance and love, ended in tragedy and solitude.

Bible Reference: MICHAL

I Samuel 18:1-27.
I Samuel 19:11-18.
II Samuel 3:13-16.
II Samuel 6:12-23.

THE GREAT WOMAN OF SHUNEM

SHE LIVED IN A HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD AND BECAME A FRIEND TO MAN

THE great woman sat in her house by the side of the road on the outskirts of the village of Shunem, close under the shadow of Mount Carmel. All around her were to be found the finest fields of ripening corn in the world.

History had been made on the very site of her home. Here, on the ground she daily walked upon, the soldiers of Israel had battled against the Philistines and had won mighty victories as God had fought with them. Here the great King Saul and his son Jonathan had been killed in battle.

To reach Mount Carmel one had to pass through the village of Shunem; so, many famous men and women of history had passed by the house at the side of the road where this great woman lived, the only woman in the Bible to be called great. A woman of property, a leader in the community, a friendly soul, reaching out hands of kindness to rich and poor alike, earning her right to be called great. And so she was; great in heart, wide in her intercourse, and extensive in her hospitality. "I am your guest," was all a tired traveler had to say when in need of shelter for the night; and in the morning his parting salutation: "God be with you and your household," was the only return allowed by his host for entertaining the stranger within her gates. It was a religious duty throughout the East.

In every Eastern home special preparations were made for the welcome of guests, an obligation observed by every family. Sweet smelling balm burned to perfume the air; bright colored coverings were placed on the bed; wine, oil, honey, dates from Jericho, milk from Samaria, fish from Joppa; all through the history of the Hebrews we meet their gracious hospitality extended to strangers.

One day, as the great woman rested on her porch during the heat of noontide, a man walked slowly along the highway passing her house by the side of the road. The great woman recognized him from his sheepskin cape and general appearance as a prophet.

"Come in and rest awhile," invited the great woman. Elisha, the man of God, was quite willing to accept this invitation extended so graciously for refreshment on his journey; thus began the long friendship between Elisha and the great woman who lived by the side of the road.

After one of these visits, which became frequent, as the man of God

journeyed very often to the school of prophets on the slope of Mount Carmel, the great woman turned to her husband and suggested: "A holy man of God is this Elisha who passes our door so frequently; suppose we build him a little chamber on our roof and furnish it for him, then he can rest there whenever he passes by."

So with the help of the village carpenter a room was built on the roof which could be reached by an outside staircase--the first "prophet's chamber" in history.

Prophets were men of power in Palestine, often chosen as judges as well as counselors of kings.

Elisha had lived in Jericho and his call to become a prophet was very dramatic. One day, as Elisha, while a young man, was ploughing his field, the celebrated prophet Elijah walked down the road, took off his sheepskin cape and threw it over the shoulders of Elisha, thus signifying that he had been called to become a prophet in Israel.

A dweller in the desert was Elijah, a prophet of wind and earthquake, while Elisha was a prophet of the still, small voice. Elisha loved to live in the towns and villages, close to the people in need, a friend to man and filled with wide sympathies and compassion.

In return for the gift of the prophet's chamber, Elisha longed to do something very special for the great woman, his hostess, but what could he give one so rich and so well loved in the community? He talked the matter over with his personal servant, Gehazi, and suggested that he find out what could please her most: perhaps a place at court for herself and her husband. So the matter was presented to the great woman, to which she replied: "I dwell among my own people." No position in life, even in the halls of the mighty at Jerusalem, could compensate for her joy as she lived by the side of the road and became a friend to man.

Finally as Elisha and Gehazi discussed the question at length, the idea flashed through the servant's mind: "She hath no child."

"Call the great woman," exclaimed Elisha; and when she stood at the door of the prophet's chamber, the prophet promised his hostess the desire of her heart--she would hold in her arms a son from God. The message gave her a joy similar to that of Sarah's, when in her old age she had been promised a son from God.

Falling on her knees in ecstasy, the woman cried: "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie to me!" A son! the reproach of a childless marriage gone; the joy of anticipation, a son, her own son, to hold in her arms! The blessing of children in the home was the prayer of

every wife's soul; the ambition of every husband, a son to carry on his name. "What leaves are to the forest, children are to the world," is the essence of an old Hebrew proverb.

In time the promised son was born, and happy days followed. From babyhood to boyhood the child grew. Father and mother shared equally in his upbringing physically, morally and spiritually.

One day when the lad was about seven years old, he begged to be allowed to go with his father and the reapers, promising to play in the hay ricks. As the reapers worked, the whole valley around the village glowed like a furnace in the intense heat of the Syrian sun.

While they rested in the shade during the heat of midday, suddenly, the boy, who had been playing in the cut grass, laid his head against his father's arm exclaiming: "Father, father, my head is burning up," and fell unconscious to the ground. Tenderly lifting him up, the father directed that the boy be carried home to his mother.

For hours the great woman held her gift from God on her knees, continuously praying: "O God, my son, my little son; Spare his life I beseech Thee!" Then as the breath slowly left his body and his heart stopped beating, in agony of spirit the mother carried his lifeless body up the outside staircase, entered the prophet's chamber and laid him on the bed. It was through the prophet Elisha this gift had been placed in her arms, and now she returned him to the prophet's care.

As she closed the door behind her a ray of hope entered the mother's heart. "Saddle my ass," she commanded a servant: "Bring the animal to the door in haste and lose not a single moment."

"Drive, go forward; slack not thy riding except I bid thee," she urged the man servant running beside her, for, driven by a mother's intense love, the great woman of Shunem believed that since her son had come as an answer to the prayer of the prophet Elisha, in some way he again might bring life into the child.

Frantically and yet hopefully the mother sped along with continuous urging of the beast on which she rode, and in the cool of the evening she rode up the steep hill to the cave on the slope of Mount Carmel where she expected to find the prophet. Elisha, resting at the door of his cave, looking toward the sunset, noticed a traveler rapidly coming toward him. "Look," he called to his servant Gehazi, "Who is this riding in such haste?" "It is the great woman of Shunem," answered Gehazi.

"Run down and meet her, and ask if all is well with her family."

Gehazi bowed before the traveler, but the great woman, springing off the ass, brushed him quickly aside, ran up the slope, and throwing herself on her knees, she caught the prophet by his robe and gasped: "Did I ask thee for a son from God? And now, he lies in your chamber and all life has gone out of his body."

At once Elisha turned to his servant: "Gehazi, take my staff; run in haste, linger not, and lay my staff on the face of the child."

Gehazi ran down the hill to carry out the wishes of his master, but the mother still clung to the prophet: "No, no, as the Lord liveth, I will not leave thee; come thyself."

So the man of God went home with the broken-hearted mother, and at the foot of the outside staircase, they met Gehazi who reported, "The child is not awake."

Elisha climbed the stairs, entered the prophet's chamber and closed the door. There on his bed, lay the lifeless body of the boy. Up and down the chamber walked the prophet, wrestling with God in prayer. Then he did a strange thing: he lay upon the child and stretched himself upon the child, the flesh of the child waxed warm, but the boy did not breathe. Continuously wrestling with God in prayer, Elisha stretched himself upon the little body, put his mouth upon the boy's mouth, his eyes upon the boy's eyes, and his hands upon the boy's hands: His faith was rewarded finally, as a shiver ran through the boy; he sneezed seven times, opened his eyes and smiled into the face of his friend.

"Go, call the mother," Elisha told the faithful Gehazi, who waited outside the closed door, and when the great woman had climbed the staircase with trembling knees and stood at the open door, Elisha placed her living son in her arms. Bowing to the ground with prayers of thanksgiving, the mother once more received her gift from God.

"The man of God came forth and gave the child
unto his mother
And went his way.
And he was there, her beautiful, her own.
Living and smiling on her, with arms folded
about her neck,
His warm breath breathing upon her lips,
And in her ears the music of his voice once more."

There is a sequel to this old story. Elisha and Gehazi never forgot the great woman who lived by the side of the road. When later it was revealed to the prophet in a vision that a famine would sweep the land for seven years, he advised his hostess of the prophet's chamber

to go into another part of the country, and the mother and son made their home by the sea until the long years of famine were over.

Returning home, the great woman of Shunem found that her house and all her lands had been seized by a stranger. Even her home by the side of the road belonged to others.

"To the king we will appeal," was her instant decision; and to the palace, with her son now grown to manhood, the great woman made her way.

Oriental kings, as a rule, were real patriarchs to their people, and as such were easy to approach, especially in time of trouble.

The king of Israel, much interested in stories about his subjects, sent one day for Gehazi, the servant of the prophet Elisha, to hear about the many miracles of mercy Elisha had performed in his kingdom. As it happened, he was deeply absorbed in the dramatic story of the mother and son who lived by the side of the road, when, just as Gehazi finished the tale--was it merely a coincidence?--the great woman herself requested entrance to the palace and an audience with the king. At once the king permitted the woman of Shunem to enter his hall of audience, and make known her request. Bowing low before the throne, she asked for the return of her house and farmlands.

Gehazi, recognizing with amazement the great woman and her son, cried unto the king: "My lord, O King, this is the very mother and son that I have been telling you about. Here stands the son whom Elisha restored to life."

From her own lips the king again heard the dramatic story and the mother's plea that her home might be restored. The king commanded one of his officers to return with the great woman: "Restore all that belongs to this woman, and in addition all the fruits of her field from the day she left home until now."

So once more the great woman and her son returned to Shunem, and lived again in her house by the side of the road, befriending man.

Bible Reference: THE GREAT WOMAN OF SHUNEM

II Kings 4:8-37.

II Rings 8:1-6.

New Testament

ELIZABETH

A MOTHER FORETOLD IN A VISION

THE perfume of crushed grapes, the gay voices of young men and women as they trampled out the red juice to make wine from the purple fruit, proclaimed the time of the grape harvest.

The soft glow of sunset lingered over the little town of Hebron, cradled in the hills near the city of Jerusalem. At the door of a vine-covered cottage stood a woman, shading her eyes with her hand as she looked down the road. A stately woman long past her youth, of serene, quiet dignity, conscious of her position in the community as wife of a priest of God, was Elizabeth, wife of Zacharias, priest in the Temple service at Jerusalem.

It was the eve of the Sabbath, and Elizabeth, her house in order, the evening meal ready, watched for the return of her husband, who for a week had been absent on his autumn service in the great Temple. Traveling was forbidden on the Sabbath which commenced at sunset, so he must soon be in sight.

During his week in Jerusalem, Elizabeth had followed in spirit the daily routine of his service. In fancy she heard the music of the silver trumpets ringing out over the gates of the city, echoing back from the everlasting hills, the voice of the Lord awakening his people to a new day of service. Three times the trumpet sounded a signal for the huge gates to swing open silently on their silver hinges, to admit the procession of priests marching into the Hall of Polished Stone; where the lots were cast every morning for the high honor of offering incense in the Holy Place.

Only once in a lifetime might a priest obtain this supreme privilege, and Zacharias, though one of the oldest priests in office, never yet had been chosen by lot for this crowning gift.

Each morning, while her husband was at the Temple, Elizabeth kneeling at her window open toward Jerusalem, joined in the early song of praise sung by the priests outside to the ones inside the Temple gates--

Outside the Temple: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

Inside; the question: "Who is the King of glory?"

Outside; the answer: "The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory."

As the sun slowly dipped behind the purple hills around Hebron, a sign that the Sabbath had come, a man riding a donkey turned the corner of the road. "Here he comes at last; I will meet him at the gate," exclaimed Elizabeth.

As a young girl she had run down the road to welcome her husband, but now she waited at the gate of their home, the last rays of the setting sun casting a shaft of gold upon her head.

When Zacharias came near, his wife saw that there was something unusual in his appearance. Joy shone on his uplifted face, a new light in his eyes, the glory of God seemed to surround him. He smiled, but did not speak.

"Welcome home, my husband, thou art late, the Sabbath is almost here."

Dismounting, the priest stooped to kiss his wife, then touching his lips and pointing upward with hands outstretched, he indicated that he had passed through a deep spiritual experience.

"A vision? Zacharias, you have seen a vision?" questioned Elizabeth. The Hebrews believed in visions, dreams, mystical communications. Their history was starred with spiritual revelations granted the chosen ones of God.

Zacharias bowed his head, and taking his wife's hand, led her into their home. Seating himself at a table, the priest took a writing tablet and beckoning Elizabeth to a place beside him, wrote, slowly, with the patience of love, the story of his marvelous vision in the Temple.

"This morning I was given the crown of my priestly service in the Temple; to me fell the lot to offer sacrifice in the Holy Place." His eyes shone in recollection of that sacred moment, and Elizabeth, joy in her voice, cried out, "My husband, I thank the Lord for giving you the desire of your heart." But she felt that there was more to the message.

Again the priest took up his writing, recording the names of the two priests he had chosen to assist him, their duties, and the solemn moment when as celebrant priest he entered the Holy Place, carrying the golden censer, and bowed before the altar, while outside the worshipers and priests watched in silence for the smoke of the incense to rise in a cloud of prayer and praise.

"As I bowed in prayer," he wrote, "I saw an angel standing at the right of the altar, and fear entered my soul; but the angel said, 'Fear not Zacharias, thy prayer is heard and Elizabeth thy wife shall bear thee a son!' "

As she read the last words with breathless attention, Elizabeth, with a cry of amazement, threw herself on her knees, rapture in her eyes, tears of joy running down her face.

"A son! A son! Born to me! Can a woman be a mother at my age? Great God of our fathers, is it possible?" turning with an agony of longing in her voice, she grasped her husband's arm. "Zacharias, thou are not deceiving me? Did the angel really say a son?"

Again the priest wrote the eventful words, "Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

The wife's head fell on her husband's knee and his protecting arms clasped her. A son! After a lifetime of unfilled desire! And to be foretold by an angel! What joy! What rapture!

Some time passed before Elizabeth was able to lift her head and smile through happy tears. "My husband, what more did the angel say?"

Zacharias gave her the tablet with the heavenly message.

"Fear not Zacharias, thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth.

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord . . . And he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost. . . to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

The child was to be great: to make ready for the Messiah! why that meant her son would be the forerunner long prophesied! What a tremendous revelation! Oh the glory of it! She was not chosen to be the mother of the Messiah but, second only in honor to that holy calling, she was to be the mother of the man who would make ready for his coming. Slowly the overwhelming significance of the full revelation dawned upon Elizabeth: the coming of the Messiah was at the door, and they, Elizabeth and Zacharias, had been set apart to train their son as forerunner to "make straight the pathway" for the Prince of Peace.

Until the morning watch, a light shone from the home of the priest, while Zacharias and Elizabeth rededicated themselves to the Lord,

and the new life to be entrusted to their keeping. "With God nothing is impossible," was their faith.

The Jewish priesthood formed a national aristocracy, the highest rank in society. All Jewish priests married, though only women of the Hebrew race, for the intense ambition of every man was to have a son to carry on his name. A priest in particular desired a son, for his office was hereditary.

It is impossible for us to understand the position of a childless wife in Israel; no children in the home was counted a punishment from God, their birth a sign of His favor:

"Give me children or I die!" cried Rachel, wife of Jacob.

"Give me a child, O Lord, and I will give him back to thee all the days of his life," vowed Hannah, mother of Samuel.

That no little feet of childhood had ever run about their home had been the one sorrow in the lives of Zacharias and Elizabeth.

Spring, the awakening time of the soul, spread its glory over the land of Palestine.

Again on a clear morning, Elizabeth stood at her door, drinking in the beauty of shrubs and trees, the perfume of white briar roses garlanding the hedges, the peace of the sun-kissed hills. Six months had passed since the angel's message had made holy her home, and now the feast of the Passover was near; what a feast of thanksgiving this year!

Turning to enter the house, the sight of a young girl riding a donkey caught her eyes. A visitor, a young girl; who could it be? Then, looking closely at the rider, Elizabeth cried joyfully, "Mary, cousin Mary!" and walked quickly to the gate, holding out hands of welcome.

Mary of Nazareth smiled her greeting and threw her arms around her cousin as they walked up to the house. There was something very solemn almost sacred in Mary's quiet manner, a holy wonder in her eyes, a radiance on her face that made Elizabeth look at her in surprise. Then suddenly the revelation of why Mary had come to her, and what it signified to them both, flooded her heart; the Holy Spirit spoke to her soul; she knew the future mother of the Messiah was beside her. "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb," cried Elizabeth, bowing in lowly adoration, "and whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Mary's answer came in a poetical outpouring of her soul.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit
hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded the low estate of his
handmaiden:
For behold, from henceforth all generations
shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath done to me great
things; and holy is his name:
And his mercy is on them that fear him, from
generation to generation."

All her life Mary had lived in the presence of God. Now, in deep humility she had accepted without question the message of the angel Gabriel. Her song of praise was in the language of the Old Testament; her son, the Anointed One prophesied from the beginning of time, was to be the deliverer of Israel.

A visit of three months Mary made to her cousin Elizabeth; the two women, mothers foretold in visions, eagerly studied together the old prophetic writings about the coming of the Prince of Peace. Zacharias, familiar with the Talmud, helped them to look up the countless references, beginning in the story of the Garden of Eden, when God said to the serpent, "the seed of the woman shall bruise thy head." His ancestry--the race of Shem, family of Abraham, tribe of Judah, line of David. Three hundred references lead up to the Isaiah prophecy: "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. . . . For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."

Mary's son was to be born in Bethlehem (so the scriptures said); there was to be a sojourn in Egypt, and they were to live in Nazareth. He was to be a spiritual Messiah, not an earthly king. Then the prophecies about the son of Elizabeth, a herald to go before and make ready for the Messiah. Prophets, hundreds of years earlier, told about the coming of the new kingdom. When and where would it be established? What would it be like?

The little town of Hebron was bathed in the sun of early summer when a new life entered the home of Zacharias, and Elizabeth became a mother.

Neighbors and relatives were invited for the eighth day, the sacred festival, when the solemn rite of circumcision would take place, and

the child would receive his name. Early in the morning, Zacharias, as priest, offered his firstborn son to God, and laid upon him the yoke of the law by circumcision. Joy filled his heart as he held in his arms the son of his old age.

According to the sign given him by the angel Gabriel in the Temple, Zacharias was still dumb, so the prayer for the naming of the baby was offered by another priest. "Our God and the God of our fathers, raise up this child to his father and his mother, and let his name be called in Israel Zacharias, the son of Zacharias."

As the priest gave the name, Elizabeth, rising up in the glory of her motherhood, interrupted: "Not so; he shall be called John."

The company of friends looked at her in surprise. "John! There is no name like that in your family." It was an unwritten law that the eldest son should bear his father's name.

But the mother, with quiet assurance, held to her point. In her mind's eye she saw the words written by her husband on that never-to-be-forgotten night: "Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

The priest turned to the father and asked his decision as head of the family. Zacharias bent for a moment over a writing tablet, then held it up so that all might read: "His name is John!" Then, to their amazement, the man who had been dumb for nine months rose to his feet, arms lifted in adoration, and burst forth into a triumphant song of praise.

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people, and hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began: that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us ...

Then, taking his son in his arms, Zacharias prophesied the future.

"And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins . . ."

The last words spoken by Zacharias in the Temple were full of doubt and hesitation; now, the seal of silence lifted from his lips, his first words formed a song of faith and rejoicing. "A sign; give me a sign by which I shall know," he had asked the angel Gabriel. "Thou shalt be

dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed," was his sign. A sign to the worshipers in the Temple, to the home community, to Elizabeth his wife. The priest had gone into the Holy Place with the power of speech, he had come out with the silence of God on his lips.

The awe struck company were filled with fear. Miracle after miracle. First the visit of the angel, then the birth of the child, now the opening of closed lips; great things were happening. Who then was this child--heralded by an angel, born out of season, surrounded by mystery? His father called him, "the prophet of the Highest." After centuries of silence would the voice of a prophet be heard again in Israel? Truly the morning light was breaking through the night of darkness; for, the herald here, the Messiah must be at the door! Rising to their feet the whole company broke into a national song of praise:

"Praise ye the Lord.
Praise God in his sanctuary, praise him in the
firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts;
Praise him for his excellent greatness . . .
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.
Praise ye the Lord."

And Elizabeth? Crowned with the honor of motherhood, her soul dwelt in peace. Her child grew; her hand the one to guide his baby footsteps, to train his mind, to sow the seeds of character. What wonder thanksgiving was her daily song of praise.

The two mothers, Mary and Elizabeth, most blessed of all mothers, met often during the years that followed. Most likely Elizabeth visited Bethlehem when the Christ Child was born. As a family they would gather at the Passovers in Jerusalem, and visit each other in their mountain homes, for their lives were bound together when their motherhood was revealed in a vision.

Years later a sword pierced the heart of both Elizabeth and Mary at the martyrdom of their sons, but the future was hidden from sight. Enough for Elizabeth to hold in her arms a son given by God. Her whole being, body, soul, spirit had been born again that night of holy memory; when, kneeling at her husband's side she read the glorious message of the angel: "Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John."

Bible Reference: ELIZABETH

St. Luke 1:5-80.

ANNA THE PROPHETESS

THE FIRST WOMAN TO ACKNOWLEDGE CHRIST AS THE PROMISED MESSIAH

ANNA, the prophetess, lived in a quiet little home nestled close to the walls of the great Temple in Jerusalem. She was one of the best known and well loved women in the city.

A small hill town in Galilee was her birth place, and her father Phanuel, had been a leader in the tribe of Aser, a tribe celebrated for its beautiful women, considered fit to be the brides of high priests and kings.

Like all Jewish girls, Anna was married in her early teens, to a man chosen by her father, but, after seven years of happy married life, her husband died and the young widow refused to marry again. In those days, an attractive young widow who did not wish to re-marry was held in high honor in Palestine. St. Paul calls them "widows indeed," and commended them to the special care of the Church.

A life of real adventure lay behind Anna, for she had lived through the terrible years of wars, conquest, and cruel oppression of her people by the Roman Empire; and because of the difficulties in her life her character had developed endurance, foresight, strength and skill.

In her old age, Anna, the well loved prophetess, literally lived all day in the Temple, for her life was bound up in the sacred services of worship and praise within its courts. Thus she earned the name of "mother of the Temple."

Many hours Anna spent studying the Old Testament writings; in particular every reference bearing on the coming of the promised Messiah; all the prophecies about Him (and the Hebrew Scriptures are filled with them) she had learned by heart. When, where would this Prince of Peace appear? Who would be so highly honored as to recognize Him first? Oh, how the old prophetess longed to see the Messiah; her heart's supreme desire was to experience the joy of holding in her arms the Babe of Bethlehem, the Anointed One of God.

The month of January, called in the Jewish calendar Tebeth, was almost ended; snow might still be seen on the hill tops around Bethlehem where "shepherds watched their flocks by night." One fine winter morning, Anna, keenly interested in the symbolic services at the Temple, entered the Court of Women to be present at the special "mothers' service," called the rite of purification, and continued to this day in our Christian Church under the name of the "Churching of

Women."

Each mother brought, according to her means, a lamb, a pigeon, or a pair of turtle doves as a thank offering to be presented to the Lord for the gift of a first-born child. The priests received the offering at the Nicanor gate, the greatest of all the gates of the Temple, made of fine brass with carvings in gold and silver. There, at the top of a circular staircase gathered the young mothers for the special service, and when the silver trumpets told of the incense burning at the altar, they silently took part in the service of rejoicing.

The winter sunshine which warmed the heart of Anna as she entered the Temple court that morning, touched with gold the tops of the stately pinnacles of the House of God, and rested on the head of a young mother riding a donkey along the road, six miles in length, which led from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. Beside her walked her husband, guiding the donkey, while in her arms she cradled her first-born child, the Babe of Bethlehem.

There was music in the air as Mary of Nazareth descended from her donkey at the Temple gate; nine clear notes of the silver trumpets, echoing back from the surrounding hills, called the faithful to worship. The outer gates of the glorious Temple were thrown open for the early morning service, but a far greater ceremony than her own rite of purification centered in Mary's heart that winter morning; her son was to be presented to the Lord in His Temple and consecrated for service.

This beautiful and significant presentation was performed in strict accordance with the customs of her people and included a promise from the parents to train their child in the knowledge of the Lord. The mother's part of the service was called the Purification; the child's, the Presentation. The presentation of a child in the Temple was proof of physical perfection in the baby, for the old Rabbinical law stated that no child, maimed, defective, or with any blemish that might unfit him for the priesthood, should ever be received in the service of presentation and redemption.

The orthodox Jews still use the ceremony of redeeming the first-born son today as it was kept in the year one. The baby is presented to the rabbi with a small sum of money, equal to five shekels (about \$2.50 in our money). Then the rabbi asks the question, "Which would you rather do--give up your first-born son, or redeem him for five shekels?"

"This is my first-born," answers the father. "Take unto thee the five shekels due for his redemption."

The rabbi repeats two short prayers, one for the law of redemption, one for the gift of the child. Then, placing his hands on the head of the child, he pronounces the blessing:

The Lord bless thee and preserve thee;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee
And give thee peace,
Length of days, years, and peace
Be gathered to thee.
God keep thee from all evil
And save thy soul.

Thus, standing in the Temple in Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph presented the Child Jesus unto God.

The presentation of a child was of peculiar interest to the prophetess Anna. Of course, she reasoned, when the Messiah comes as a baby (as recorded in the Old Testament prophecies), the parents would at once bring Him to the Temple, so she always was very careful not to miss the service of Presentation.

Now there was an old man living in the city called Simeon. Some writers say he was the father of the well known Gamaliel, and that he had three special spiritual gifts: justice, fear of God, and a perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah. Like Anna, his life centered in the arrival of the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

A restless desire, perhaps a leading of the spirit, urged Simeon on that eventful morning to attend the service of Presentation. He had experienced a wonderful dream in the night: a vision of God, telling him that before he died he would surely see the Messiah. Searching for word of His coming, Simeon found a reference in the Old Testament to the appearing of the King of Glory in the Temple; so day after day, the old man climbed the hill to the gate, wondering if that day was to be the great day in his life.

Watching the children as their mothers presented them to the Rabbi for his blessing, suddenly, as Mary brought her son forward, an inner voice told Simeon the promised Messiah was before him.

Trembling with awe, he walked up to Mary after the service, holding out his hands in longing, a light from heaven in his eyes; and, quite willing to please the old man, the mother placed in his arms the Babe of Bethlehem. Simeon, in a rapture of thanksgiving, lifted on high the Child Jesus, and blessed God in words that live in our hearts today:

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,
According to thy word:

For mine eyes have seen thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of
thy people Israel.

The old prophet stood on a mount of vision as he sang his mystical song of praise. With the eyes of his soul he foresaw that in the future this light, sent by God, would reach out unto the uttermost parts of the earth.

Anna and Simeon must have been friends for many years, as both lived only for the services in the Temple, and the great longing of their hearts was for the coming of the Messiah. Perhaps they spent happy hours together discussing the prophecies about His coming. Now, at the close of their lives, Anna, as well as Simeon, received a spiritual sign that the time of waiting was over.

Standing near Simeon at the service of Presentation, Anna saw his arms outstretched for the Child of Mary, listened to his song of thanksgiving, and realized that their supreme wish had been granted. Her eyes filled with happy tears, echoing in her heart Simeon's prayer of rejoicing. Anna sank on her knees, bowing in true humility before the Messiah of the world.

Of course, she too would hold out arms of love for the glorious child, and, of course, Mary, with a mother's pride in the interest aroused in her first-born, placed the sacred Babe close to the heart of the old prophetess.

Next to Simeon, Anna was the first of the Jewish race publicly to claim the Christ as Messiah.

Only once, after that dramatic morning in her life, is Anna mentioned in the Bible. St. Luke tells us that she went back and forth in the streets of Jerusalem, telling all whom she met about the coming of the Prince of Peace; that He was alive on earth, that she had held Him in her arms, and that He was growing to manhood in their country.

Anna--called the mother of the Temple. Our interest in her story is focused in the supreme historical fact that she is recorded as the first woman publicly to recognize and acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

Bible Reference: ANNA THE PROPHETESS

St. Luke 2:22-38.

THE SYROPHEMCIAN WOMAN

THE TRIUMPH OF A MOTHER'S FAITH

A GAY circle of women in bright oriental dresses surrounded the village well of Sarepta, half way between the twin cities of Tyre and Sidon, one summer morning. Mothers and daughters from homes in the village gossiping over their Water pitchers, for women were the appointed water carriers of the home. In those days there were no women's clubs, no conference centers, no shopping districts where they might meet each other, so the village well had become the social gathering place, and there a group of women might be found daily, before the heat of the day or in the cool of the evening, laughing, talking, gossiping.

The border cities of Tyre and Sidon were only a two days journey over the hills from the Lake of Galilee, but the people who walked the streets were a mixed race of Canaanites and Jews, dating back to the days of the settlement of Palestine by the Israelites.

The famous "cedars of Lebanon" had been cut by the wise King Solomon from the hills above the twin cities, and used by him in the building of his wonderful Temple in Jerusalem. "The queens of the sea," as these cities were called, were celebrated all over the then known world; for merchandise from the glass works of Tyre and the huge vats of Sidon was shipped from the wharves spread out on the shores of the Mediterranean, to meet the demands of princes and rulers.

Thousands of years had passed since the reign of King Solomon, and the orthodox Jews of Palestine had grown to despise the mixed races living in Syrophenicia. "Heathen dogs," the Jews called them, because Jehovah the God of the Hebrews was worshiped by them side by side with the heathen gods Baal and Ashtoreth.

But a real piece of news had been carried to the well of Sarepta that summer morning. The great Rabbi Healer from the shores of the Lake of Galilee actually had been seen walking the streets of the twin cities, and now, it was reported, was visiting, with His twelve friends, in the home of a faithful Jew on the outskirts of their own village.

"He has made dumb people speak, and deaf ones to hear," exclaimed one gossip. "My cousin Jonathan saw Him do it."

"More than that, He fed thousands of hungry people with a few rolls and some little fish," asserted another.

"My sister's son tells a story of how this Rabbi Jesus made a dead

man, a mother's only son, sit up and live again," put in an eager listener. But that was almost beyond believing.

"He is a Jew and will not have anything to do with us, as we are of a mixed race. They even dare to call us heathen dogs." This was the voice of a scornful Canaanite woman.

"Yet He cured the servant of a Roman centurion, even without seeing the sick man, and the Jews also call the Romans heathens," suggested another. "Why did the Rabbi Healer come here, if He is too proud to help us?" inquired a bystander.

An anxious, sad, tired looking woman walking up the road, with her pitcher on her shoulder, heard the latter part of the conversation and asked eagerly. "Is it the great Healer from the Lake of Galilee you are talking about?" The other women gathered quickly around the newcomer, glad of the opportunity to repeat all the marvels they had heard, for nothing seemed beyond the power of this strange worker of miracles, who could cast out devils, cure leprosy, heal the blind, deaf, lame, even raise the dead son of a broken-hearted mother, and call back from heaven a little daughter to the arms of her parents.

At the last words, the sad woman filled her pitcher, with trembling hands raised it to her shoulder, and without a word of farewell walked rapidly down the road.

Justa, the name given in ancient legends to this woman of Syrophenicia, was a mother in dreadful trouble. Her little daughter, her only child, was sick unto death. "Possessed of an unclean spirit," declared the neighbors. "Grievously vexed by a devil," writes St. Matthew.

Sickness not understood was always attributed to demon possession in the East. The old name for mental diseases seemed to be possession by devils.

Every kind of superstitious remedy known in the country (and they were as numerous as they were awful) had been tried on the unhappy little girl, tossing on her bed with fever. Neighbors and friends daily brought new suggestions for the heart-broken mother, but her daughter only grew worse.

Now came the blessed news of the Rabbi Healer, here in their own village. He had cast out the devil of sickness from a Roman, not of the Jewish race, might He not possibly cast out the devil tormenting a little Canaanite girl? If it was to be done, there was no time to lose, for the Rabbi would slip away as quietly as He had come.

Leaving her jar of water at the door of her home, the mother of great faith walked, almost ran up the road, inquiring her way. Yes, the Healer, the man she wanted was still within reach at the home of a friend on the very edge of the village.

"Help! Help! Have mercy, O Lord Rabboni!" The agonized cry of a mother in despair rang through the quiet house. At the door a strange woman, a Canaanite, on her knees, her face eloquent with longing, held out hands of supplication.

"Have mercy on me, O Thou Son of David! Have mercy on my little daughter, for she is grievously vexed by a devil."

Thus came the cry for help, ringing out from the agony of a mother's soul. Peter, one of the twelve, who often felt called upon to serve as a bodyguard to protect and watch over their leader, jumped to his feet at the cry.

"Trouble not the Master; He resteth after the journey and must not be disturbed," he said in a firm voice, and walking to the door, he stood in front of the intruder so that she might not enter the house.

Pushing Peter to one side, the Syrophenician entered the house where Jesus was. She must reach the Healer, at whatever cost, she must plead for her dying daughter at His feet.

"Send her away," whispered James, one of the twelve. "She is not of our race."

"Trouble not the Master; He is resting," explained Thomas.

Hearing the commotion, Jesus of Nazareth raised His head from the couch on which He rested, and looked toward the door.

"Send her away, Master, she crieth after us," pleaded John, who sat near Him. But in an agony of persistence, the mother crossed the room and threw herself on the ground before the Rabbi Healer, clasping His feet in supplication.

"Son of David, have mercy on me!"

The beauty of mother-love: "Have mercy on me," Her child's need, her need; her child's pain, her pain.

At last the tender voice of rare sweetness spoke; "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

His first mission was to the Jews. Perhaps Christ wished to teach this Canaanite woman about His earthly mission; or, what appears more

likely, was testing her faith in Him, therefore did not at once grant her request.

But the mother cared not for His mission; her concern was for the life of her child. And she believed He could heal her daughter.

Bowing humbly at the feet of the Rabbi Healer, in true simplicity she prayed: "Lord help me," voicing the anguish of her mother-heart.

Jesus of Nazareth replied quietly. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs."

Then the mother in need appealed directly, not to the Son of David, not to the Messiah of the Jews, but to the Lord of all nations. Her lifted eyes overflowed with tears, but in a voice firm with faith came her quick response:

"Truth, Lord, but even the little dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs."

It was the second time that the Christ found perfect faith in His power to heal outside the Jewish nation: first in a man from Rome, now in a woman from Syrophenicia.

His face illumined with love, tenderly the Rabbi Healer stretched out His hand in blessing on the devoted mother's head, reassuring her: "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Looking up into the face of the Christ, the mother knew her prayer was granted, her faith had triumphed over every difficulty, her daughter was saved. Radiant with joy, she kissed the hem of Christ's robe and hurried home.

There, on the threshold, waiting to welcome her mother home, stood the little daughter.

"Come, rejoice with us!" called the happy mother to her neighbors, "for this my child, was sick unto death, and now is alive with health; she was lost to me, but now has been made well."

Justa is the name given in ancient writings to this mother of Syrophenicia, but like many other fine types of womanhood mentioned in the Bible, her personal name is omitted. We read of the woman of Samaria; Jephthah's daughter; the great woman of Shunam; the little Syrian maid; the widow of Nain; and many others, nameless, but chosen as types of undying faith in God and man.

The triumph of a mother's faith is the story of this unnamed woman of Syrophenicia, who, with the Roman centurion, received the great

commendation of Jesus Christ: "I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel."

Bible Reference: THE SYROPHENICIAN WOMAN

St. Matthew 15:21-28.

St. Mark 7:24-30.

CLAUDIA PROCULA

THE ONLY ONE TO PLEAD FOR THE RELEASE OF THE CHRIST

IT WAS spring in the land of Palestine, A.D. 33, the month of Nisan, which we call April, the flowering time of the year.

Jerusalem was crowded within and without her gates for the annual feast of the Passover. Every country in which Judaism had established a foothold sent delegates to the sacred city. Parthians, Medes, travelers from Mesopotamia, Asia, Egypt and Rome swarmed the narrow streets, speaking the languages of the lands of their birth, and the confusion of tongues at the destruction of the Tower of Babel was not more bewildering than the confusion of languages at the Temple, beloved by all the pilgrims.

The link uniting these strangers from faraway countries into a nation of Jews, was their intense loyalty to the religion and history of their forefathers, symbolized by the fasts, feasts and daily services celebrated in the Temple according to the laws of Moses.

On the day for the setting apart of the paschal lamb, the day we call Palm Sunday, Jesus Christ--Himself the Lamb of God-- rode through the city streets to the Temple, heralded by the joyous cry, "Hosanna: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

The city was enthused. Crowds followed the Christ and the disciples. Pilgrims from far lands stretched their necks for a glimpse of the man who was the center of this demonstration.

"Who is He, where did He come from, what great thing has He done?"

"This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth," answered the multitude, waving palm branches as they sang. "All the world has gone after

Him."

In the stately palace of the Herods, in the city of Jerusalem, reigned the Roman Governor of Judea, appointed by the Emperor Tiberius Cæsar.

His name was Pontius Pilate.

Historians describe Pilate as an obstinate, merciless man, exercising royal authority with great cruelty. Only six years in office, but he had drawn upon himself a bitter hatred because of his profound contempt for the Hebrew race held captive by Rome. A low superstitious crowd he thought them, to be brought under authority only by severe discipline, and ruthlessly he treated the people, in utter disregard of their Jewish customs. One of the serious causes for the anger Pilate had stirred in the hearts of the Jews was taking money from the treasury of their sacred Temple to build a huge reservoir in the city, connecting it by an aqueduct with the palace to supply water for his Roman baths. His only religion was devotion to the Emperor who had given him the position of Governor which included the supreme power over life and death to everyone not a citizen of Rome.

As this bitterness might at any moment flame into a rebellion in Jerusalem, the hotbed of religious fanaticism, Pilate had decided to spend most of his time in that city, especially during the celebration of the annual festivals, and to this end had transferred the center of the Roman government from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

Within the royal chambers, set apart for the wife of the Governor in the palace of the Herods, lived the lady Claudia.

Claudia Procula, as her name is recorded by historians, was a member of a distinguished and powerful family in Rome, the Gente Claudia.

By birth and connection of higher rank than her husband, it is possible that her influence at court had gained for him the post in Judea, and the fact that she traveled with him from place to place in Palestine spoke of mutual love and understanding.

An apocryphal gospel describes Claudia as a convert to Judaism, and the Greek Church has placed her in their catalogue of saints, her day of remembrance October 27th. Edersheim suggests that the truth lay between these statements and that in addition to becoming a convert to Judaism, like the wife of a former Roman Governor, Claudia had come to know something about the Christ, and secretly believed in His teachings. It is quite possible that from the flat roof of the palace Pilate's wife watched Christ's entry into the city, surrounded by the

palm-waving Galileans, and heard the echo of their song of triumph, while her maids-in-waiting whispered tales of the healing of the sick, raising of dead men, and the story of the traders whipped from the sacred Temple courts.

The women of ancient Rome were greatly attracted to various myths, cults and religions, because of a deep longing to know more about personal immortality. Claudia, it is surmised, was one of these women who, weary of the cold pagan gods of Rome, were attracted to the study of oriental cults--the mysteries of Mithra, Osiris and Isis; they had even investigated Judaism, and some of the nobility had become converts to that religion.

Hearing of the curious teachings of the prophet of Galilee on her arrival in Judea, Claudia was greatly interested in his startling words about the immortality of the soul.

Here was a fresh interest in her life, knowledge of a religion centered on the vital question of the place of the soul after death.

"In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you."

"I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

"The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels."

Mystical words like these set one thinking; and Claudia, keenly interested in the interpretation of the mystery of immortality, without doubt would make an opportunity to meet this prophet from Galilee and talk with him of the thoughts which filled her mind.

It has been suggested that Pilate, knowing Claudia's interest in Jesus of Nazareth, had told her of the request from the High Priest that a band of soldiers from the castle of Antonio be sent to arrest the Christ, as it was considered unwise to trust such a grave matter to the hands of the undisciplined guards of the Temple.

That night, the night of the Passover, Claudia tossed restlessly on her ivory couch, her mind filled with fear of the future. In touch with the difficult problems of government facing her husband, and fully acquainted with his personal danger from the anger of Caesar, if a rebellion should break out in Jerusalem in consequence of the arrest

and imprisonment of the popular hero, the wife of Pilate was troubled in spirit.

Each time she tried to sleep, a terrible dream enslaved her mind; visions of a cruel mob, crucified men, darkness engulfing the land, earthquakes, dead men coming to life!

Again and again she slept fitfully, only to awake bathed in perspiration, a cry of horror on her lips.

What was happening around her? So real was her dream, bringing such agony of mind, Claudia felt sure it was founded on truth.

The Romans had always been startled by dreams and omens. Was not Julius Cæsar murdered, said they, because he neglected the dream of Culpurhia?

The Hebrews, too, regarded a dreamer as a medium of divine communication. The dreams of Jacob, Joseph, Solomon and Paul were direct messages from God. Job speaks of "visions in deep sleep" as revelations from God to man.

"In a dream, in a vision of the night . . . then he openeth the ears of men." The influence of the Spirit of God upon the soul of men extending to sleeping as well as waking thoughts.

Claudia was fully aware of what might happen as a sequel to the arrest of the Christ. Her dream of terror was colored by the events of the day, and it called upon her, as the wife of Pilate, to stand as an intercessor for a man she knew to be just. There is mystery in God's approach to the soul of this good woman.

Little is recorded in the Bible about the wife of Pilate: only a few lines in the Gospel of St. Matthew. Not even her name is mentioned, but her dream will forever remain an unforgettable part of the drama of the crucifixion; the dream of the only human being, heathen, Jew or Christian, who dared to stand up and plead for the release of Jesus Christ, on the day of His trial.

We can visualize for ourselves the lady Claudia, wife of Pontius Pilate, trembling from the mental exhaustion of her terrible dream, hastily rising in the early morning, determined to speak to her husband at once, before he left his room. Suddenly she is conscious of the sound of a multitude of voices coming from the court of the palace--that court which had witnessed so many tragedies in the reign of the Herods, and now was to become the background of the tragedy of the world.

Had the trial of the Galilean started? Was she too late to speak to Pilate? Trial and sentence must be immediate, so much Claudia understood, for this was the day before the Sabbath; by sundown all must be over.

Slipping silently through the corridors to a room overlooking the entrance court, Pilate's wife opened a casement window and gazed down upon the judgment seat. What a dramatic scene lay below her.

As it was the eve of their Sabbath, the Jews who had condemned Jesus considered themselves far too holy to enter the door of a heathen Governor. Trials in the open air were common under Roman rule, so Pilate had made use of the entrance court in front of the palace, called the Pavement, because it was inlaid with a mosaic of colored stones. This court was also called Gabbatha, the high place, as it was high above the crowded street. In the trial of criminals, a raised tribunal was ordained by law, so that all might see and hear.

The official marble seat had been moved out from the great hall of justice, and on this tribunal, in his gorgeous robes of office, Pontius Pilate sat in judgment on the Saviour of the world.

Encircling the open court a mob of angry, excited, revengeful faces. On each side of the tribunal, soldiers, spears in hand, the Roman eagle on their helmets.

In the center stood the silent prisoner, the lonely Man of Power; the first rays of the morning sun resting in benediction upon His head, heralding the dawn of a new day.

Pilate's decisive voice reached the casement window clearly.

"I find no fault in this man. Ye have a custom that I release unto you one at the Passover; will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews?"

Claudia Procula realized that this was the time to warn her husband. On her ivory tablet she wrote:

"Have nothing to do
With that just man.
I have suffered many
Things this day in a dream because of him.

Claudia."

Calling a page, Pilate's wife sent the message to her husband.

Not only for the man she called just was Claudia troubled but also for her husband. A mistake at this crisis would end his influence at the court in Rome.

The note troubled Pilate for he, too, had faith in dreams and visions. He remembered the death of the Roman Emperor who had disregarded the dream of his wife. Pilate had found no fault in the prisoner, even called him a "righteous man," and was willing to release him. Now he was given his great opportunity.

What a different estimate the world would have formed of Pontius Pilate had he been brave enough to listen to the voice of his conscience, speaking through his wife. What a pity he was such a coward. The message from Claudia was the climax in his life. He rejected his great opportunity. For nearly two thousand years his name (spoken oftener in the Christian Church than any other save that of Jesus Christ) has daily been repeated in the creed, in accusation: "Suffered under Pontius Pilate," thus classifying him with Judas.

According to tradition he, too, committed suicide a few years later.

Claudia, leaning out the window, eagerly watched the effect of her message, and Pilate's question, "Shall I release unto you this man?" Forever in her ears would echo that terrible cry:

"Crucify Him! Crucify Him!"

Her warning unheeded, the wife of Pilate, the only person in Jerusalem, friend or foe, who dared say a word in behalf of the lonely prisoner, closed the casement.

Claudia Procula had failed. Her heart was sorrowful and afraid, for a strange darkness suddenly shut out the daylight. For three hours day was turned into night. What dreadful things were taking place?

A tremor shook the palace to its foundation; an earthquake, followed by the sound of rushing winds; and the sacred veil before the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the veil of gold and purple, sixty feet long, was rent in two, from top to bottom.

The dread visions of the night were enacted before her eyes.

Pilate's wife fixed her startled gaze out her window, on "the green hill far away without the city wall." As the darkness slowly lifted, shining rays from the setting sun pierced the clouds of gloom.

Three crosses on Calvary's hill were bathed in radiant glory.

Bible Reference: CLAUDIA PROCULA

St. Matthew 27:19.

LYDIA OF THYATIRA

THE FIRST CONVERT TO CHRISTIANITY IN ALL EUROPE

THE great missionary, Paul of Tarsus, stood on the shore at Troy, looking across the sea. Far off in the distance gleamed the mountains of Europe; and he wondered, as he looked across the sea to the other continent, if the great commission, "Go preach my gospel unto the ends of the earth," did not challenge him to cross and preach the good tidings of the gospel to the people of another land.

But he paused for guidance. Here he was in Troy, the land sung by Homer and Virgil, cradle of the Roman race, the seaport built by Alexander the Great. Helen of Troy and her world-famed beauty had changed the history of the country. Was a new adventure to be born on the historic plain; an adventure of the cross, to change the history of the world?

In the middle of the night came a vision to Paul; a man clad in European dress stood beside him crying, "Come over and help us!"

The vision: A cry from Macedonia.

The program: "Immediately we sought to go."

A man of action, Paul lost no time, after receiving his marching orders, in sailing across to Neapolis. A busy center for unloading ships, that harbor of Neapolis, so consequently little notice was taken of the four men who stepped ashore and started on their ten-mile walk along the mountain road to Philippi.

As he rested on the hill, his heart filled with the great adventure, Paul had his first view of the plains of Philippi.

Philippi was a military city, immortalized by Brutus, Cassius and Mark Antony in their fight for the conquest of the world. Romans, Greeks and a few Jews made up the population. Since there were not enough Jews to support a synagogue, a small house of prayer was opened by the river Gangites. It is very possible that the Jews had been forbidden to worship their God in the heart of the city. Or it might

have been that the house by the river was chosen because it gave opportunity for the many ablutions required in the old Jewish service. Often, at the time of the national fasts, services were held on the banks of a river.

Paul and his comrades set out to seek the synagogue on the Sabbath morning, his first in Philippi, and not finding one in the town they made straight for the river bank, and there he found Lydia.

A successful business woman, a seller of purple, a Greek by birth but a Jewess in religion, was Lydia of Thyatira. Her home town was one of the important headquarters of the famous dye works, which held a secret formula for making the exquisite purple and scarlet dyes used for the robes of kings and princes. From a shell fish came the coloring for the dye. Legend says that a dog which was very fond of opening and eating shell fish arrived home one day with his mouth stained a glorious shade of red. His enterprising master, possibly a dyer, noted the kind of fish his dog ate, experimented in his vat with the color, and finally developed cloth of such rich scarlet and purple that the King of Troy ordered the dye to be kept for his royal family.

Why Lydia had moved from her home town to Philippi is not known. Possibly it was to open a new center for selling the beautiful purple and scarlet robes which had become so fashionable. She was a successful business woman and must have had an interest in the bazaar she had started in the city. Although there was great opposition to women traders in those days, Lydia had made such a success of her new venture that she had established herself as a leader in the city. At the same time she took her religion very seriously. Living in a heathen city, where all the shops kept open every day of the week, Lydia insisted on closing her business establishment on the Jewish Sabbath at sunset on Friday, preferring to lose the trade of her best customers rather than keep her shop open for business on that holy day.

Wealthy and famous was Lydia, but very lonely in Philippi. She had lost her husband and had no children, and was living away from her home town, her friends and relatives. Evidently she had become a leader in the prayer group, the only religious meeting for women recorded in the New Testament.

That special Sabbath morning when she was leading the prayer worship of the women they heard footsteps and voices, and on the threshold of the little room stood four strange men. The Jews, banished from Rome by the Emperor Claudius, were not encouraged to settle in the Roman colonies. They had to bear insults and petty persecutions, although as yet there had been no direct outbreak

against their peculiar form of worship. The small company of women gathered together in the house by the river, "where prayer was wont to be made," were startled to see these four strangers at the door. What was their mission? Had they come to break up the services? Paul's familiar greeting, "The peace of God be with you," reinforced by the quiet attitude of the group, at once reassured them. Strangers they were, but by speech and dress devout Jews from a far country.

Lydia, a woman of grave beauty, with braids of hair coiled around a fine head, and probably wearing one of her flowing purple robes, rose to her feet with quiet dignity to welcome the strangers: Paul, Silas, Luke and Timothy.

Paul, a learned Jewish Rabbi, and Luke, a well known Greek physician, took time to sit down with a group of European women, asking and answering questions; following in the footsteps of their Master, who, in conversation with one woman proclaimed for the first time his Messiahship, and to another woman, Martha of Bethany, gave the greatest message of the Gospel: "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

Into the story of the gospel Paul threw himself heart and soul, rejoicing that he was taking his Christ into a new world. Even to outline all the tremendous truth--that Christ the Messiah had lived, died, ascended, and that his kingdom on earth was established--must have taken hours. His enthusiasm struck fire in the hearts of the women. Lydia took the lead when Paul had finished speaking. Trained as she was to make prompt decisions in her business life, she stood up fearlessly, her eyes lit by an inner light, and declared: "I am ready to receive the Christ as the Messiah, the holy Son of God." One historian writes that Lydia was doubtless baptized that same day in the river flowing by the house of prayer.

"Come into my house and stay with me," Lydia invited the four missionaries, adding with humility "that is, if ye have judged me to be faithful." Perhaps Paul realized that her position in the community, her success as a business woman, and her enthusiasm for the new faith would make her home an important evangelistic center for building the church he longed to establish in Philippi. Lydia's conversion, too, would encourage her weaker sisters, and her desire to render service as a woman missionary for the Kingdom of God was a gift of great strength to the cause to which Paul had devoted his life. So, Paul, Luke, Silas and Timothy went home with their new friend and stayed as her honored guests during their visit in Philippi.

The church in Philippi was started by two remarkable conversions:

Lydia, the seller of purple, and the keeper of the prison. When it had become known in the city that their foremost merchant had joined this new faith, and was entertaining the strangers from Palestine in her home, a great stir was created all over Philippi. The little Jewish missionary, Paul, had grown too popular to please the people in power; and when one day he healed a poor woman possessed by a devil, the masters of the woman, who made money from the fortunes which she told, had Paul and Silas arrested, beaten and imprisoned. Hence followed the dramatic story of Paul and Silas singing in the prison, the earthquake, the jail doors shaken open, iron bands loosened, and the attempted suicide of the keeper of the prison.

He, too, asked the question: "What must I do to be saved?" and, following the example of Lydia, he entered into the Kingdom of God by baptism.

As Peter, released from prison in Jerusalem, knocked at the door of Mary, mother of Mark, so Paul and Silas, released by the earthquake, knocked at the door of Lydia, and she surrounded them with loving care until their missionary adventures called them away, leaving Luke in charge of the new Christian church, the first in Europe.

In ecclesiastical history every saint is represented by a symbol relating to some incident from life, and it is quite in order that Lydia, who has been placed by the Roman Catholic Church in their category of saints, should be given the symbol of an open door, for she threw open the door of her beautiful home to entertain the missionaries, and kept it open to all the members of the new church which Paul founded in Philippi.

The church at Philippi was a symbol of joy to Paul, as Lydia was to him the symbol of perfect womanhood. Years later, in his Epistle to the Philippians, written from Rome, Paul specially recommends to this church he loved the most, "those women which labored with me in the gospel. . . whose names are in the book of life."

From the time Lydia became the first Christian woman in the Gentile world in Europe, Christianity has ever been a religion of the home and of the family. Lydia is recorded as having her household baptized into the faith of Christ.

Courage had Lydia, courage to suffer for her faith, for in opening her home as a center for this unpopular religion she jeopardized her business in that heathen city, and perhaps forfeited her life in the persecutions which came to the new sect. Only a quiet little talk one Sabbath morning, with a small group of women in a house by the side of a river, about the Way of Life, but it brought forth a rich

harvest, the church at Philippi, which remained steadfast during the great persecutions that followed.

Like Anna the prophetess, the woman at the well in Samaria, and the Magdalene on the morning of the resurrection, Lydia of Thyatira went forth to tell all she met the glorious news of the gospel of salvation.

Lydia, proud to earn her own living in those early days; Lydia, proud to open her door to strangers so that others could hear the good tidings; Lydia, proud to witness for her Lord and Saviour in the midst of a heathen city: Is it too much to think that Paul had this fine woman of Philippi in mind when he wrote to the Philippians thanking God for his remembrance of them, and committing to the care of the church, "those women which labored with me in the gospel"?

Bible Reference: LYDIA OF THYATIRA

The Acts 16:8-40.
Philippians 4:3.