

PLEASANT HOURS

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Ruin.

'Tis only a glass of liquor
Standing on the bar;
'Tis only a mother's darling boy
Who begins his life to mar.

'Tis only a case of drunkenness,
"Carried home by a friend;"
'Tis only a case of a bright young boy
Who begins too late to mend.

'Tis only a case of murder,
The trial begins at four;
But why go into details,
He's behind the prison door.

THE BOY DISCIPLE.

BY

ANNIE FELLOWS JOHNSTON.

CHAPTER VII.

It was Sabbath morning in the house of Laban the Pharisee. Joel, sitting alone in the court-yard, could hear his aunt talking to the smaller children, as she made them ready to take with her to the synagogue.

From the upper chamber on the roof came also a sound of voices, for two guests had arrived the day before, and were talking earnestly with their host. Joel already knew the object of their visit.

They had been there before, when the preaching of John Baptist had drawn such great crowds from all the cities to the banks of the Jordan. They had been sent out then by the authorities in Jerusalem to see what manner of man was this who, clothed in skins and living in the wilderness, could draw the people so wonderfully, and arouse such excitement. Now they had come on a like errand, although on their own authority.

Another prophet had arisen whom this John Baptist had declared to be greater than himself. They had seen him drive the money-changers from the Temple; they had heard many wild rumours concerning him. So they followed him to his home in the little village of Nazareth, where they heard him talk in the synagogue.

They had seen the listening crowd grow amazed at the eloquence of his teaching, and then indignant that one so humble as a carpenter's son should claim that Isaiah's prophecies had been fulfilled in himself.

They had seen him driven from the home of his boyhood, and now had come to Capernaum that they might be witnesses in case this impostor tried to lead these people astray by repeating his claims.

All this Joel heard, and more, as the earnest voices came distinctly down to him through the deep hush of the Sabbath stillness. It shook his faith somewhat, even in the goodness of this friend of his friend Phineas, that these two learned doctors of the Law should consider him an impostor.

He stood with respectfully for them to

pass, as they came down the outside stairway, and crossed the court-yard on their way to the morning service.

Their long, flowing, white robes, their broad phylacteries, their dignified bearing, impressed him greatly. He knew they were wise, good men whose only aim in life was to keep the letter of the Law, down to its smallest details. He followed them through the streets until they came to the synagogue. They gave no greeting to any one they passed but walked with reverently bowed heads that their pious meditation might not be disturbed by the outside world. His aunt had already gone by the way of the back streets, as it was customary for women to go, her face closely veiled.

The synagogue, of finely chiselled limestone, with its double row of great marble pillars, stood in its white splendour, the pride of the town. It had been built by the commander of the garrison who, though a Roman centurion, was a believer in the God of the Hebrews, and greatly loved by the whole people.

Joel glanced up at the lintel over the door, where Aaron's rod and a pot of manna carved in the stone were constant reminders to the daily worshippers of the

were recited in silence by each devout worshipper. Then the leader repeated them aloud, all the congregation responding with their deep Amen! and Amen! Joel always liked that part of the service and the chanting that followed.

Another roll of parchment was brought out. The boy looked up with interest. Probably one of his uncle's guests would be invited to read from it, and speak to the people.

No, it was a stranger whom he had not noticed before, sitting behind one of the tall elders, who was thus honoured.

Joel's heart beat so fast that the blood throbbled against his ear-drums, as he heard the name called. It was the friend of his friend Phineas, the Rabbi Jesus.

Joel bent forward, all his soul in his eyes, as the stranger unrolled the book, and began to read from the Prophets. The words were old familiar ones; he even knew them by heart. But never before had they carried with them such music, such meaning. When he laid aside the roll, and began to speak, every fibre in the boy's being thrilled in response to the wonderful eloquence of that voice and teaching.

The whole congregation sat spell-

bound, "Let his peace and come out of him!" he commanded. There was one more shriek, worse than before, as the man fell at his feet in a convulsion; but in a moment he stood up again quiet and perfectly sane. The wild look was gone from his eyes. Whatever had been the strange spell that had bound him before, he was now absolutely free.

There was another stir in the woman's gallery. Contrary to all rule or custom, an aged woman pushed her way out. Down the stairs she went, unveiled through the ranks of the men, to reach her son whom she had just seen restored to reason. With a glad cry she fell forward, fainting, in his arms, and was borne away to the little home, now no longer darkened by the shadow of a sore affliction.

Little else was talked about that day, until the rumour of another miracle began to spread through the town. Phineas, stepping at Laban's house on his way home from an afternoon service, confirmed the truth of it.

One of his neighbours had been dangerously ill with a fever that was common in that part of the country, she was the mother in law of Simon bar Jonah.

It was at his home that the Rabbi Jesus had been invited to dine.

As soon as he entered the house, they besought him to heal her. Standing beside her, he rebuked the fever, and immediately she arose, and began to help her daughter prepare for the entertainment of their guest.

"'Tis well was there yesterday," said Phineas, "to carry some broth she had made. She thought then it would be impossible for the poor creature to live through the night. I saw the woman a few hours ago, and she is perfectly well and strong."

That night when the sun was setting, and the Sabbath was at an end, a motley crowd streamed along the streets to the door of Simon bar Jonah. Men carried on couches; children in their mother's arms, these wasted by burning fevers; those shaken by successing palsy, the lame, the blind, the death-stricken,—all pressing hopefully on.

What a scene in that little court-yard as the sunset touched the wan faces! "I smiled into dying eyes. Hope for the hopeless! Palm for the broken in body and spirit! There was rejoicing in nearly every home in Capernaum that night, for none were turned away. Not one was refused. It is written, "He laid his hand on every one of them, and healed them."

That he might not seem behind his guests in zeal and devotion to the Law, the dignified Laban would not follow the crowds.

"Let others be carried away by strange doctrines and false prophets, if they will," he declared; "as for me and my household, we will cling to the true faith of our fathers."

So the three sat in the upper chamber on the roof, and discussed the new teacher with many shakes of their wise heads.

"It is not lawful to heal on the Sabbath day," they declared. "Twice during the past day he has openly transgressed the



RUINS OF THE WHITE SYNAGOGUE, CAPERNAUM.

hand that fed and guided them from generation to generation.

Joel limped slowly to his place in the congregation. In the seats of honour, facing it, sat his uncle and his guests, among the rulers of the synagogue.

For a moment his eyes wandered curiously around, hoping for a glimpse of the man whose fame was beginning to spread all over Galilee. It had been rumoured that he would be there. But Joel saw only familiar faces. The elders took their seats.

During the reading of the usual psalm, the reciting of a benediction, and even the confession of the creed, Joel's thoughts wandered. When the reader took up the scroll to read the passages from Deuteronomy, the boy stole one more quick glance all around. But as the whole congregation arose, and turned facing the east, he resolutely fixed his mind on the duties of the hour.

The eighth benediction, or prayers,

bound, forgetful of everything except the earnestness of the speaker who moved and swayed them as the wind does the waving wheat.

Suddenly there arose a wild shriek, a sort of demon-like howl that transfixed them with its piercing horror. Every one turned to see the cause of the startling sound. There, near the door, stood a man whom they all knew,—an unhappy creature said to be possessed of an unclean spirit.

"Ha!" he cried, in a blood-curdling tone. "What have we to do with thee, Jesus of Nazareth? Art thou come to destroy us? I know thee, who thou art, the holy One of God!"

There was a great stir, especially in the woman's gallery, and those standing nearest him backed away as far as possible.

Every face was curious and excited, at this sudden interruption,—every face but one; the Rabbi Jesus alone was calm.