

THE BETHLEHEMITES.

(From the German, By Julie Sutter.)

PART I.—"IN HIS NAME SHALL THE GENTILES TRUST."—Continued.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

Her father, the centurion, would often speak longingly of Rome, of her palaces, her pleasures, her feasts in the arena. Not so Virginia, who had grown accustomed to the life in Judaea in these quiet years since her mother's death. She had found out, to be sure, that the people of the land who worshipped Jehovah would have nothing in common with the nation of idols; her proud father moreover had forbidden her to be on friendly terms with her Jewish neighbors. But since their houses almost touched, she could not but watch the habits of the priest's family, especially when they gathered on the roof. In the stillness of the present evening there she was a witness to the scene we have described. And though she could not hear all that was said, yet she understood from their gestures that a solemn subject of unusual interest must be the theme of their conversation. But those words of prophecy which Zadok had spoken with uplifted voice rung in her ear, filling her with marvel as to their import. "And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."

"What could be the meaning," she mused, "a God, a governor at Bethlehem? The Jews worship but one God, how should there be another at Bethlehem?" And again, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace." He must be a wondrous God, if all this could be said to Him! She would ask Rachel about it. Rachel often would linger when the family had retired; she would call her to the garden wall, she would learn of her what it meant.

Zadok and his family meanwhile had lifted their hands in prayer, raising them over their heads after the fashion of the Jews. "Lord, how long! Tarry now, but come, thou hope of thy people in whom the Gentiles shall trust."

On the wings of the evening air even these words reached Virginia, and wistfully she murmured:

"Can a God of the Jews be aught to the Roman? Could he wake hope and trust in me?"

Zadok was blessing his children, and in his turn humbly bowed his head to receive his mother's benediction.

They were yet on the roof of their house, when a man and a woman came slowly up the road, gaining the steep hill. The man was evidently a carpenter, for in one hand he carried a basket with tools. On his back was strapped a bundle that seemed to contain change of linen and coarse woollen coverings. The woman by his side was young, her face was lovely, but pale; wearily she rested on his arm, and both were covered with dust.

"Strangers," said Ketura, watching them.

"Come from afar, evidently," said Zadok. "But methinks, I know who they are—friends of Abel, the carpenter, who met them at noon by Rachel's sepulchre. He tarried behind me on their account. The poor young wife looks sadly worn."

"She does, indeed," said Ketura pityingly; adding after a while: "we might have called them in to spend the night with us."

"They will find all they need at the inn," returned Zadok.

"Perhaps not, father," cried Joseph, "for I heard the good man say some hours since, if more strangers arrived, he could only lodge them with the cattle, for no room was left at the inn!" "May I run and bring them back, father," urged Samuel.

"Not to-night, my boy. I am weary of the journey myself, and anxious to go to rest. To-morrow I will go and inquire, and if it is as Joseph said, I will offer them hospitality."

The travellers were vanishing from their sight behind a curve of the road which turned at a right angle almost by the house of the centurion. Virginia also had noticed the pair, and as they passed beneath her father's house she bent over the parapet watching them. Why did her heart beat? she knew not. She felt strangely moved at the sight of that poor travel-worn woman; she would have liked to call these tired wanderers in and give them rest, but she dared not in her father's absence, and without his approval. But as she leant over the parapet, a rose she wore in her hair fell down to the feet of the woman, who looking up, smiled at the maiden. And strange to say, Virginia's heart seemed to fill with sunshine, she could but smile in return. A wondrous calm entered her breast, she seemed conscious of love only, doubt and sadness having vanished. Her eyes followed the way-worn traveller till another curve of the

sticks... And here it is," she cried; "how delighted he will be that I have found it. Good night, Virginia!"

"Can you not stay a minute?" asked the latter shyly.

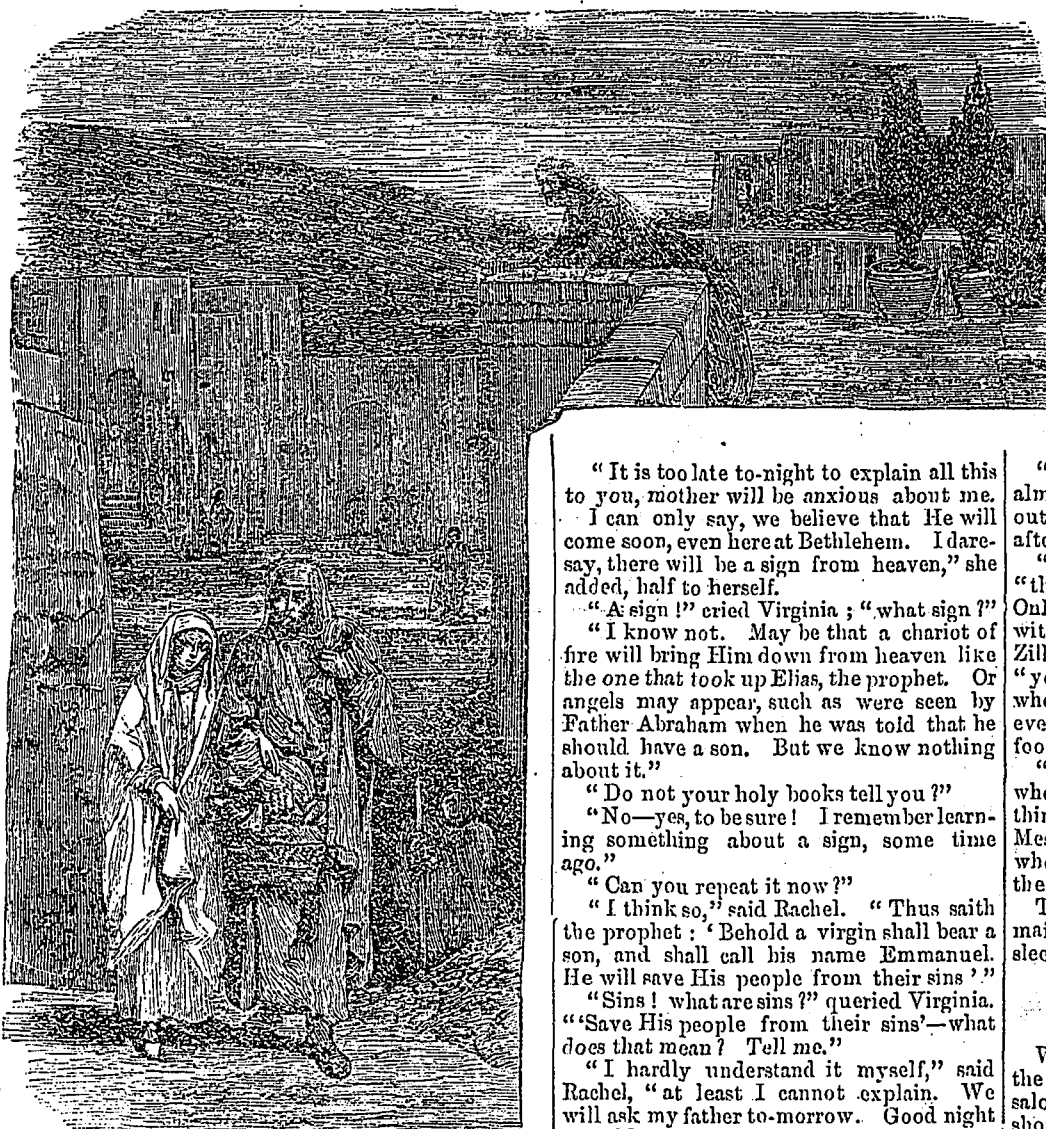
"Well—not long!" replied Rachel. "They are all gone to bed; it was only at my urgent entreaty that mother permitted my running out for a moment."

"I—I wanted to ask you," began Virginia hesitatingly, "to tell me about this God of whom your father spoke to you this evening. At least what I heard seemed to me to refer to a God about to be born here, at Bethlehem. Is it so?"

"Yes," said Rachel simply.

"But—I cannot understand—I thought your people believed in one God only—Him whom you call Jehovah."

"So we do, but we look for His Son whom He will send to save us, the Messiah, the Prince of Peace. The Jews have been waiting for Him for years. For, many days ago, nay hundreds of years ago, the Lord Jehovah has promised by the mouths of His prophets to send Him; and his word is now about to be fulfilled." "How can you tell?"



STRANGERS FROM AFAR.

road hid them from view. Now only she remembered again that she had been anxious to hear about the God to be born at Bethlehem, and turning around she found that the priest's family had descended from the roof. "They have all retired for the night," she said; but no, the slight figure of Rachel moved in the garden.

Little Titus had cuddled himself up with his lamb, and both seemed asleep; she could leave him alone for a minute. Quickly she ran down the narrow stairs, calling to Afra as she passed to put the child to bed; and with hasty footsteps she sped through the garden to the wall at the further end. Rising on tip-toe she saw Rachel who apparently looked for some lost object among the bushes.

"Have you dropped anything?" queried Virginia.

Rachel, who had not heard her coming, started and smiled. "Not I," she said, "but my brother Joseph cannot find the knife which my father gave him before he went to Jerusalem; he is afraid father may tax him with carelessness. He remembers having used it here yesterday, cutting some

"It is too late to-night to explain all this to you, mother will be anxious about me.

I can only say, we believe that He will come soon, even here at Bethlehem. I dare say, there will be a sign from heaven," she added, half to herself.

"A sign!" cried Virginia; "what sign?"

"I know not. May be that a chariot of fire will bring Him down from heaven like the one that took up Elias, the prophet. Or angels may appear, such as were seen by Father Abraham when he was told that he should have a son. But we know nothing about it."

"Do not your holy books tell you?"

"No—yes, to be sure! I remember learning something about a sign, some time ago."

"Can you repeat it now?"

"I think so," said Rachel. "Thus saith the prophet: 'Behold a virgin shall bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. He will save His people from their sins.'"

"Sins! what are sins?" queried Virginia. "Save His people from their sins"—what does that mean? Tell me."

"I hardly understand it myself," said Rachel, "at least I cannot explain. We will ask my father to-morrow. Good night now, Virginia, I must not stay any longer!" away she ran, disappearing within doors.

Slowly and thoughtfully the Roman maiden retraced her steps. How empty and comfortless seemed her dwelling. She wished her father were there, that she might speak with him. She went to her chamber, and without undressing, lay down on her bed. Strange thoughts and feelings chased sleep away. It was as though she also were waiting for the God that should be born at Bethlehem, as though she needed Him! She called her Greek attendant, requesting her to carry her couch upon the roof; restless as she was, she would spend the night in the light of the stars.

In that Eastern country the nights, even at that season, are generally warm and pleasant, so that Virginia, wrapped in a brodered covering, need not fear cold or damp. She lay still, gazing at the spangled heavens; the stars seemed like friendly eyes to her, and she felt less lonely than before. She thought of her dead mother, of her father away at the Roman citadel. And again she occupied her thoughts with the Messiah of whom Rachel had spoken, whispering half-unconsciously: "Bless me also thou God of Bethlehem, and let me see thy sign!"

Her eyes were heavy, and Virginia slept.

CHAPTER IV.

That same evening the Egyptian physician had been called to attend a case of illness, his daughter Zillah awaiting his return. Midnight had passed, when there was a stir in the street, and, believing it might be her father, she hastened to the door. It was not he, but she heard voices in the distance. She ran up to the roof, and perceived what looked like a cloud of dazzling light. As she stood wondering, it faded from the sky. Strangely moved she sat down by the parapet; not long, and there were figures speeding along the street, and the words she heard filled her with amazement.

When the physician arrived presently, and Zillah had let him in, she said: "Father, what is it that moves the town at this unusual hour?"

But he could only tell her that he had met the sons of Elizabeth running with haste toward the inn, to see a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger. "These shepherds have lost their heads," he added, "else how could they leave their flocks by night to run after a babe! A manger, moreover, is a strange place where to seek an infant."

They ran past this house," said Zillah, "and I heard them speak of the Messiah. It must be Him they seek."

"More wonderful still," remarked the physician, "a Messiah in a manger—a King dwelling with ox and ass!"

"But, father," said the maiden shyly, "do not we worship animals, and is not Apis an ox?"

"To be sure," returned the Egyptian with a smile of contempt. Like most of the learned men of his nation, he had his own views concerning these deities, whether ox, or cat, or crocodile; he looked wonderingly at Zillah, seeing that she was moved.

"Father," she continued after a while, almost tremblingly, "I would like to find out in the morning—there may be a King after all. May I go?"

"By all means," replied he laughing; "this is but harmless curiosity in my child! Only do not go alone: but take Rebekah with you, the Jewish nurse. Good night, Zillah," he added, kissing the upturned face, "you shall tell me all about this new God when you have seen Him. To think that even a daughter of mine could be so foolish!"

"But was it folly?" she said to herself when left alone. "Might there not be something in this Jewish expectation of a Messiah!" She knew many at Bethlehem who looked for His coming. "I will go in the morning and see for myself," she said.

The night was far advanced, and the maiden having sought her couch, slept the sleep of youth.

(To be continued.)

WHEN the State writes "Criminal" over the door-way of the most elegant drinking-saloon, as well as over the lowest grog-shops; when it places the bar of justice the tempter by the side of his victim, and when it stamps every package of liquor as a dangerous beverage, meriting destruction as a public nuisance, it has done much to warn the young and unwary, and to turn their feet aside from the downward path.—*Judge Pitman.*

WE ARE SOWING seeds of truth or error every day we live, which are sure to take root in somebody's life.

THE NEW YEAR.

I am the little New Year, ho, ho!
Here I come tripping it over the snow,
Shaking my bells with a merry din,—
So open your doors and let me in!

Blessings I bring for each and all,
Big folk and little folk, short and tall;
Each one from me a treasure may win;
So open your doors and let me in!

Some shall have silver and some shall have gold,
Some shall have new wooties and some have old;
Some shall have brass and some shall have tin,
So open your doors and let me in.

Some shall have water and some shall have milk,
Some shall have satin and some shall have silk;
But each one from me a blessing may win;
So open your doors and let me in!

—*Youth's Companion.*