

PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK.

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Not Yet.

My boy Bert, with dancing eyes,
Flushed and eager went from play,
Half a dozen times a day,
Straight to where a red book lies
On the lowest library-shelf,
Found the page all by himself,
Where a lion is portrayed
Springing towards a shrieking maid.
Long he looked at this attraction;
Then he remarked, with satisfaction,
Flipping back his curls of jet,
"The lion hasn't got her yet."

That was years and years ago;
Still the trembling little maid
In the red book is portrayed
Facing her terrific foe;
And my boy with dancing eyes,
Views them now without surprise.
When my heart is full of fear,
Fancying there is trouble near,
And I dread what is to be,
Then he breaks out laughingly:
"Auntie, don't you fuss and fret;
The lion hasn't got her yet!"

THE BOY DISCIPLE.

BY

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CHAPTER X.

High up among the black lava crags of Perca stood the dismal fortress of Macherus. Behind its close prison bars a restless captive gazed his way back and forth in a dungeon cell. Sometimes, at long intervals, he was given such liberty as a chained eagle might have, when he was led up into one of the towers of the gloomy keep, and allowed to look down, down into the bottomlessorges surrounding it. For months he had chafed in the darkness of his underground dungeon; escape was impossible.

It was John Baptist, brought from the wild, free life of the desert to the tortures of the "Black Castle." Here he lay at the mercy of Herod Antipas, and death might strike at any moment. More than once, the whimsical monarch had sent for him, as he sat at his banquets, to be the sport of the passing hour.

The lights, the colour, the flash of gems may have dazzled his eyes for a brief space, accustomed as they were to the midnight darkness of his cell; but his keen vision saw, under the paint and purple of royal apparel, the corrupt life of king and court.

Pointing his stern, accusing finger at the uneasy king, he cried, "It is not



THE MIRACLE AT NAIN.

lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife!" With words that stung like hurtling arrows, he laid bare the blackened, beastly life that sought to hide its foulness under royal ermine.

Antipas cowered before him; and while he would gladly have been freed from a man who had such power over him, he dared not lift a finger against the fearless, unflinching Baptist.

But the guilty Herodias bided her time, with bloodthirsty impatience; his life should pay the penalty of his bold speech.

Meanwhile he waited in his cell, with nothing but memories to relieve the tediousness of the long hours. Over and over again he lived those scenes of his strange life in the desert,—those days of his preparation,—the preaching to the multitude, the baptizing at the ford of the Jordan.

He wondered if his words still lived, if any of his followers still believed on him. But more than all, he wondered what had become of that One on whom he had seen the Spirit of God descending out of heaven in the form of a dove.

"Where art thou now?" he cried. "If thou art the Messiah, why dost thou not set up thy kingdom, and speedily give thy servant his liberty?" The empty room rang often with that cry, but the hollow echo of his own words was the only answer.

One day the door of his cell creaked back far enough to admit two men, and then shut again, leaving them in total darkness. In that momentary flash of light, he recognized two old followers of his, Timeus bar Joram and Benjamin the potter.

With a cry of joy he groped his way toward them, and clung to their friendly hands.

"How did you manage to penetrate these Roman-guarded walls?" he asked, in astonishment.

"I knew the warden," answered Benjamin. "A piece of silver conveniently closes his eyes to many

things. But we must hasten! Our time is limited."

They had much to tell of the outside world. Pilate had just given special office by appropriating part of the treasure of the Temple, derived from the Temple tax, to defray the cost of great conduits he had begun, with which to supply Jerusalem with water.

Stirred up by the priests and rabbis, the people besieged the government house, crying loudly that the works be given up. Armed with clubs, numbers of soldiers in plain clothes surrounded the great mob, and killed so many of the people that the wildest excitement prevailed throughout all Judea and Galilee.

There was a cry for a national uprising to avenge the murder.

"They only need a leader!" exclaimed John. "Where is he for whom I was but a voice crying in the wilderness? Why does he not show himself?"

"We have just come from the village of Nain," said Timeus bar Joram. "We saw him; stop a funeral procession and raise a widow's son to life. He was followed by a motley throng whom he had healed of all sorts of diseases; and there were twelve men whom he had chosen as life-long companions."

"We questioned some of them closely, and they gave us marvellous reports of the things he had done."

"Is it not strange," asked Benjamin the potter, "that having such power he still delays to establish his kingdom?"

The captive prophet made no answer for awhile. Then he gazed in the thick darkness till his hand rested heavily on Benjamin's arm.

"Go back, and say that John Baptist asks, 'Art thou the Coming One, or must we look for another?'"

Days passed before the devoted friends found themselves once more inside the prison walls. They had had a weary journey over rough hills and rocky by-paths.

"What did he say?" demanded the prisoner, eagerly.

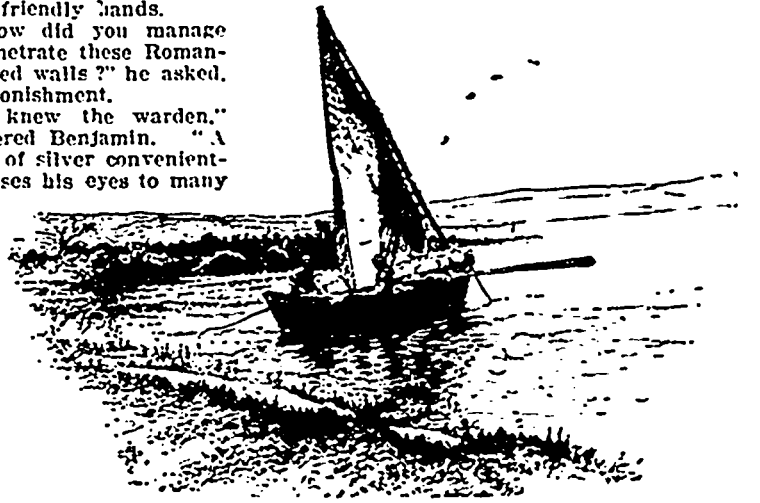
"Go and tell John what ye saw and heard—that the blind receive sight; the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed; the deaf hear; the dead are raised; and the poor have the gospel preached unto them."

The man stood up, his long hair hanging to his shoulder, his hand uplifted, and his eyes dilated like a startled deer that has caught the sound of a coming step.

"The fulfilment of the words of Isaiah!" he cried. "For he hath said, 'Your God will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man



TIBERIAS AND THE SEA OF GALILEE.



A FISHING-BOAT ON THE SEA OF GALILEE.