

Choice Literature.

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A KING OF TYRE.

A TALE OF THE TIMES OF EZRA AND NEHEMIAH.

BY JAMES M. LUDLOW, AUTHOR OF "THE CAPTAIN OF THE JANIZARIES," ETC.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Tyre was never more splendidly arrayed than on the day set for the coronation of King Rubaal. To one approaching from the sea the island city seemed like a mighty ring studded with gems, so many were the bright banners that flashed in the sunlight from its encircling walls; while the centre of the city glowed with the golden roofs of the Temple of Melkarth.

The day was perfect. The clear azure of the sky reflected itself in the bending mirror of the waters, — an omen of the favour of Heaven upon the plans of men. Even the rough sailors from other Phœnician cities, as they turned their prows towards the Tyrian harbour, called the slight motion of the graceful billows the nod of Baal; and when the waves broke with pleasant murmur upon the outlying rocks, they cried, "Behold the laughter of our gods!"

Although more than a year had passed since the reins of power had fallen into the hands of Pubaal, many things had occurred to delay his formal investiture with the regal dignity. Chief among these causes was the refusal of the Great King, Artaxerxes, who was an unbeliever in the religion of the Phœnicians, to grant his official recognition of the miraculous taking off of the late king. The court at Susa had insisted upon better evidence than the word of the priests for the bodily translation of Hiram to the unseen world.

Hanno, whose genius and zeal made him the chief man in Tyre, was apparently most impatient at the delay; and, as was commonly believed, had spent much time at the Persian capital, labouring to overcome the scruples of the World Monarch. He had but lately returned, bearing, as he asserted, the document that expressed the royal permission. Its great seal had been seen by many, who had also read a separate decree designating Hanno as agent of the Persian Government, and commanding him, in the name of the Great King, to arrange for the speedy restoration of the Tyrian throne to its legal dignities, under the suzerainty of the empire. The Satrap of Syria had likewise been ordered to send to Tyre a detachment of several thousand soldiers, who by their pomp should represent the glory of Artaxerxes in the ceremonial, and by their power should defend the royal will if it chanced to be opposed.

The Phœnician cities sent their princely delegations, whose vessels fairly embroidered the coast with their gay pennants as they came from far and near. Inland tribes were also represented. Sanballat of Samaria sent a band of several hundred of his braves. And Manasseh, the high priest of the Samaritan religion, accompanied them, gorgeously arrayed in the vestments of his office. The hills of Galilee contributed a company of men, under command of Elnathan of Giscala, whose stalwart bearing compensated for their lack of martial finery.

The Great Square was transformed into a vast pavilion, beneath which tens of thousands could gather and witness the ceremonies. On one side of the pavilion was an immense dais, carpeted with the richest fabrics from the looms and dyeing-vats of Tyre. On this stood the ancient throne of bronze, with its lion-headed arms. Over it hung a canopy of purple, which was also draped behind the royal seat, and, by its contrast, made the silver dove with outspread wings seem like a veritable messenger from Astarte, flashing its white light like a celestial blessing upon the faces of the multitude. There were raised seats about the dais for the members of the Great Council, and stalls for the leaders of the various guilds of the hierarchy.

In the ancient palace of the kings of Tyre, Rubaal waited impatiently for the summons to join the grand procession. Proudly he paced the chambers once occupied by King Hiram. Mirrors reflected his goodly form and attire from every side, but not so flatteringly as his attendants echoed his praise, and predicted the glory of his coming reign. His palanquin waited at the palace gate.

By it passed first the trumpeters, sounding the popular joy to the very sky with their melodious clangor. Dancing women followed, keeping step to the thumping of their tambourines. A thousand Persian horsemen clattered next. Then came high officers of state and dignitaries of foreign courts. Hanno strode at the head of the royal guard of honour, a band of his own selection from among the noblest young men of Tyre. These halted at the great portal of the palace, and gathered closely about the king's palanquin. The gate of the royal residence swung wide and closed again. Four men of gigantic stature, naked except at the loins and for the rings that shone about their ankles and arms, lifted the palanquin to their shoulders, its gorgeous curtains of silk screening the royal personage from the gaze of the people, until he should stand before them beneath the sparkle of his crown. The bands from Samaria and Galilee were honoured with the next position in the cortege. A litter that seemed of beaten gold bore the noble prince Esmunazar, son of King Tabnit of Sidon, who represented that neighbouring throne. Then followed Egbalus, whose repute for sanctity and inspiration had led to his re-election to the high priest's office for a second year. Priests of all grades and divinities closed the procession.

The well-marched host entered the great pavilion, filing in order passed the dais and throne, and allowing the dignitaries to take the places assigned them. The royal palanquin passed behind the purple hangings.

A blare of trumpets rang out. Egbalus ascended the steps of the dais, holding in his hands a cushion upon which lay the sceptre and ancient crown of Tyre. Turning to the multitude he addressed them, rehearsing in stately speech the renown of the Tyrian monarchy through the centuries since their city was founded by the divine Tyrus. He dwelt upon the times of Hiram the Great, and then burst into

rhapsodic eloquence as he described the translation of that other Hiram who had been taken to the gods.

"As surely as the beams of the sun-god shine this day, so surely does the blessing of our King Hiram—our divine Hiram—fall upon us. Hail him! Praise him for the voluntary sacrifice by which he has won forever the favour of Baal for his people of Tyre! Think of him when the light gleams into your homes, for Hiram is a beam of Baal! Adore him when it flashes from the sea where he guides your ships! Worship him in the fire light of your sacrifices, for the flames are the bright rays from the crown of our invisible king!"

As Egbalus paused, the priests led the multitude in cries of—

"Hail, Hiram the Blessed! the son of Baal!"

Egbalus resumed—

"Whither went the spirit of Hiram? O ye sons of men! I saw the spirit of Hiram ascend into the domes of heaven! Again I saw it descend to the earth. It entered the form of another—of your new-chosen king. Hail, Rubaal!"

The crowd echoed the cry, "Hail Rubaal! Rubaal Hiram!" until the covering of the great pavilion snook and swayed as if lifted by the wind.

Then the high priest turned towards the curtain behind the throne. He prostrated himself upon the dais. Rising to his knees, and holding aloft the cushion with the sceptre and crown, he cried in his most august tones—

"Come forth, thou chosen of Baal!"

The curtain swayed aside. Egbalus stared an instant, as if stricken into stone. He dropped the cushion. Attempting to rise, his limbs became entangled in the profusion of his priestly drapery, which tipped him backward, and tumbled him shrieking with fright, together with the rattling crown and sceptre, down the steps of the dais.

The attendants did not pause to look at the high priest, for before them stood KING HIRAM, his hand upon the back of the throne. His familiar voice, sharp in its taunting sarcasm, rang through the pavilion—

"Lo! I have come forth, O priest of Baal!"

The great councillors of state climbed out of the balcony in which they were seated, and scrambled with the baser crowd to get away from the dreadful apparition. Men trod upon one another like a frightened herd. Heads, legs and arms, trumpets, banners, swords and sandals made a confused mass of what a moment before had been as dignified an assembly as ever king or pontiff had looked upon. The prepared places of egress were not sufficient for the fleeing crowd, who tore away the canvas sides of the pavilion, and broke its cords, until the mighty canopy hung awry as if struck by a hurricane.

But the dominant passion of a crowd is curiosity. Many would risk an annihilating glance from the eyes of the god if only in return they could see what he looks like. Therefore, some, withdrawing a few paces, turned again to face the awful mystery. The soldiers from Persia, Samaria, and Galilee seemed not to have been sufficiently informed to have any fear, and, obeying a quick command which Hanno gave them through their officers, ranked deep about the dais to protect it.

A sharp hissing sound went like a flying serpent through the air, and an arrow, shot by some one in the crowd, glanced clanging from the arm of the throne. In another moment the thundering tramp of the squadrons of Persian horse shook the earth as they dashed around the pavilion, sweeping priests and people into every open way, or trampling them beneath the hoofs.

The square was cleared. The priests fled towards the temple. Thither the soldiers pursued them, halting and penning them in the great court, until further orders should come.

At the same time heralds flew everywhere throughout the city, crying, "King Hiram has returned! Down with the villainy of the priests!" Great placards were posted on the doors of the government house and on the corners of the streets, detailing in few words the facts.

In little groups, or one by one, the more venturesome or the less credulous of the people re-entered the pavilion. Hiram had taken his throne. There was no mistaking his person. He wore the conical cap with the uræus, the scarf across his bare breast, the short chiton and heavy sandals, by which his form was familiar to even the boys as well as to the great councillors of Tyre.

As Hiram gazed at the returning people an old man came tottering to the foot of the dais. He threw himself upon the lowest step. He was Ahimelek.

"Rise, Ahimelek, Councillor of Tyre!" said the king.

But he moved not. An attendant approached him. He was dead.

A commotion was made at the rear of the pavilion. Two men, the captain of the Samaritans and the captain of the men of Galilee, brought before the king the limp form of Egbalus. The miserable man turned to flee, but his captors kept his face to the throne. At length he gathered strength. That tremendous will which had so often dominated others asserted its mastery over himself. He looked Hiram squarely in the eyes.

"Thou has conquered, O infidel king! But thou shalt not have me to grace thy triumph."

Before his guards were aware of his purpose, he had plunged his priest's knife to his heart.

"Take him away!" coolly said the king.

In the meantime men had gone to the king's palace, where Rubaal and a few of his favourites had awaited the summons to join the coronation procession. Wearied by the delay, they had ventured to the door, but found it fastened. Their cries for help were answered by the shouts which shook the city. But now the gates were flung open. Rough soldiers thrust Rubaal into a common palanquin, such as was cheaply hired at the docks, and bore him to the pavilion. There the carriage was opened. Rubaal crouched within it like a rat in a trap.

The soldiers dragged him out. His brave apparel, royal from purple mantle to diamond-set sandals, was as strange a contrast with the simple garb of the real king as the kingly look of Hiram was with the mean and cowardly aspect of Rubaal.

"Harm him not," said the king. "There is a drop of royal blood somewhere in his body. You might spill that drop if you spilled more. All royalty is safe to-day. Come, cousin, sit in my chair if you like. We have played together in the same crib. Ah! in ill-humour again! Just so you were as a child."

The wretched man slunk away, and sat with averted face on the edge of the dais.

The king stepped down from his throne, and stood a moment over the dead body of Ahimelek.

"The gods pardon him! Carry him to his house, and prepare him for the tomb, where we will ourselves accompany him; for he was the father of Zillah."

Reascending the dais, he turned to Hanno, who during these scenes had stood almost motionless, watching everything, and alert lest his plan should miscarry in the least—

"Now, Hanno, for the coronation!"

A silver trumpet sounded sweetly. The curtain back of the throne moved, and through the opening Zillah came. Radiant with sparkling jewels, she was more radiant with the beauty of her queenly soul that shone through her features and dignified her every movement. Her joy in her husband's triumph, her consciousness of having shared with him his misfortunes, and of her daring to share with him the dangers that still press about him, gave her a royalty of appearance that even a crown could not augment.

"My Queen!" said Hiram, as he took her hand and seated her upon the throne. He raised the crown and placed it upon her brow.

"Behold the Queen of Tyre!"

APPENDIX.

"Hiram, King of Tyre, to Manasseh, son of Iouda, son of Eliashib, High Priest of Jehovah in Samaria: Greeting."

"Health and the blessing of thy God be with thee! Our hearts are cheered by the tidings of thy prosperity. May thy temple rise speedily from the heights of Gerizim! Gado the bearer of this letter, is most famed among our architects. He bears our royal commission to abide with thee so long as his skill pleases thy purpose. He carries with him a thousand minas, a contribution from our treasury to the worship of thy God. He will also present to thee a fabric of our unexcelled workmanship, which has been wrought upon by the hands of Zillah, our Queen beloved, in which she desires that thou shalt enwrap the copy of thy Law, as thou art thyself enwrapped in our affection."

Should the reader desire to know more of the affairs of Manasseh, let him read the histories of one Josephus the Jew. And should his interest be great to learn of the subsequent career of Hiram and his beautiful queen, the faithful chronicler would refer him to the source whence he himself has derived his information. In the Museum of the Louvre is a stone coffin, in which once lay the body of Esmunazar, King of Sidon. The sarcophagus bears this inscription: "I adjure every royal personage that he open not this chamber, nor remove this coffin, lest the holy gods destroy that royal personage and his offspring for ever." They who esteem themselves wise in such matters tell us that this prophetic curse was recently fulfilled in the misfortunes that fell upon the house of the late Emperor of the French, Napoleon III, in the reign of which "royal personage" this coffin was robbed of its contents and brought to Paris. But though the body of Esmunazar is no longer in it, if one will listen intently at the ear-hole in the coffin, one will find it as full of historic suggestions as a conch-shell is of news from the bottom of the sea.

THE END.

RECOLLECTIONS OF OXFORD.

My not being at a public school has, I have no doubt, strengthened my love of my university and my college. In my time the "headmasters" had not had everything their own way. It was possible to enter Oxford before the age of nineteen; it was nothing wonderful to get a scholarship before eighteen or even earlier still. And to be scholar and fellow of Trinity from 1841 to 1847 was something to be. It was indeed a circle to look back to of which fifty years ago I was chosen a member, a circle of which a man is much to be blamed if he is not wiser and nobler for having been one. But love of the foundation, the feeling of membership, of brotherhood, in an ancient and honourable body, the feeling of full possession in one's college as a home, the feeling of personal nearness to a benefactor of past times, all that gathers round the scholar ship that was something worthier than a mere prize, the fellowship that was something worthier than a crammer's wages—all this, I hope, has not even yet utterly vanished, but, under the hands of one reforming commission after another, such feelings have undoubtedly greatly weakened in the Oxford to which I have come back. In the unreformed university, the unreformed college in which I had the happiness to spend my youth, we had time to learn something, because we were not always being taught. We were not kept through our whole time, vexed by examination after examination, examined in this subject one term, in that subject the next term, all ingeniously combined for the better forgetting of one thing before the next was taken in. We had one examination, and a searching one, the successful passing of which could not seem to any but a fool to be the goal of study, but which, by the reading it required, gave a man the best possible start for study in several branches of knowledge. — *Edward A. Freeman, in the April Forum.*

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