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THE DEBORAH OF THE 19th CENTURY.

A Sermon preached Sabbath evening, January 20th, 1889, by HENRY FRANCIS ADAMS, to Ladies only, on which occasion about 500 were present. At the close a collection was taken to place this sermon in every home in Yarmouth.

Judges 4:9.—“The Lord shall sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

For twenty long years the Jewish nation had been cruelly oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. This Royal heathen tyrant had a large army, one notable feature of which was the iron war chariots, used by him in warfare, and which numbered nine hundred in all. The commander-in-chief of this army was Sisera, a man of a valiant spirit, ever ready for war, and on whose superior generalship king Jabin depended for a defence or extension of the empire. The power that had so long and so cruelly held the Israelites in slavery created in the minds of the enslaved but one idea, that was, that Jabin was their *common enemy*. One would have thought that having been trodden with the iron heel of oppression for the fifth part of a century, the Jews would have had crushed out of their hearts all hope of ever being again free from the yoke of bondage. But that significant clause in the third verse of this fourth chapter of Judges, “And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord” indicates that hope had not vanished from their minds, for men never pray when they cease to hope. They were captives, but they believed God could break their chains. They were weak, but they believed that God's power could overcome their enemies. God had permitted them to be oppressed as a chastisement for sin, but He was waiting to deliver them as soon as they repented and cried unto Him for help. Though God was willing to bring about a change in the people's condition, there must be some agency through which it should be effected. The Lord generally selects a man to lead in those great reforms which have for the end the elevation of humanity and the glory of His name; but if a man for the times be wanting, He has always found a woman qualified as the instrument of the desired change.

At this period of the history of the Jews the wisest and holiest person in the nation was Deborah, a Prophetess. Whether there were men capable for the high and difficult task of judging the people we do not know, but it is sufficient for us to know that God chose a woman through whom to communicate His will to the nation. Day by day, she sat under a palm tree to hear and decide family and other troubles. For although the Jews were in captivity, they preserved and were allowed to follow their own legal customs in the settlement of disputes. But that a woman should be elected by God and man to occupy so prominent and responsible a position as the leadership of several millions of people in their political movements, and as Law-

giver in their family and moral relations, has created surprises in the minds of many.

When the captives cried unto the Lord for deliverance, He commanded Deborah to muster ten thousand men toward mount Tabor, which when she had done, Sisera came forth with his great army, and his celebrated cavalcade of nine hundred chariots of iron, intending in a very summary manner to quell the rebellion. He may have thought in heart, “What can this woman do, to incite and lead this poor down-trodden people to war? Ah, but Sisera left out of his reckoning the chief and invincible power that inspired and would sustain the rebels in the humanly speaking unequal combat. The battle was in reality the Lord's, the woman was only the agency in bringing it to pass. Her word was with power, because it was the Word of the King. Her marshalled handfuls of men were mighty because God was with them. This conflict was to be another illustration of the watch-word of that old warrior of the Cross, Paul, “If God be for us who can be against us?”

Here stand Deborah's brave-hearts on Mount Tabor waiting for her word of command. Rough, rugged, and poorly equipped for war, yet confident that the prophecy of their beloved and revered national mother must come to pass, for her wisdom and God-inspired judgments of the past justified them in their expectation. There come Sisera's mighty host of trained and tried warriors. Well drilled in the cruel arts of heathen warfare; amply supplied with best weapons obtainable; with their swords and spears glittering in the sun-light, their unbroken ranks march with thoroughly disciplined step, to the inspiring tunes of their national songs. The tramp, tramp, tramp of the great multitude of foot soldiers, and the rumble of the wheels of those nine hundred iron chariots, and the prancing of the horses which sent the battle afar off all combining to awe the Israelites, and forecast defeat. As soon as Sisera arrives at the base of the mount, with the calm assurance of an easy victory, pitches his camp on the great plain to prepare his ranks for the attack. Without losing a moment, Deborah, whose heart was leaning on the Almighty arm, gave the word of command to her captain, Barak, and said, “UP FOR THIS IS THE DAY IN WHICH THE LORD HATH DELIVERED SISERA INTO THINE HAND: IS NOT THE LORD GONE OUT BEFORE THEE?” So Barak went down, and his 10,000 men followed. As the opposing forces met the Lord discomfited Sisera's host; snapped off the wheels of his chariots, and gave his great multitude of warriors into the hands of Barak, who with his men slew them all. Sisera himself suffering death at the hand of Jael, the wife of Heber. Then the victorious Israelites pursued these gentiles unto their own city, and succeeded in capturing and killing even that monstrous tyrant king Jabin himself.

Then sang Deborah and Barak this magnificent triumph song, giving all the glory of the victory won to the great God who blessed their banners on the field of war. “Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves.” “Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the Lord; I will sing praise to the Lord God of Israel.” “Lord when Thou wentest out of Seir, when Thou marchedst out of the field of E.lom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped; the clouds also dropped water.” “The mountains melted from before the Lord, even that Sinai from before the God of Israel.” “They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.” “The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon.”

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