

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 XIX.

An hour later the inn-yard was deserted, except by a single group of persons, who, notwithstanding their exceedingly diverse appearances, were preparing to depart together. There was the party of Marduk, which, besides the merchant himself, consisted of Eliezar, a Damascene, a shrewd tradesman to whom were entrusted the details of the business; and there were half a score of others who filled the various offices of the travelling camp—cook, tent-maker, camel-drivers, muleteers, and the like. With their clattering tongues and jangling accoutrements, as they ranged their various beasts for the journey, they were in unique contrast with the company of Jews who had accepted their convoy.

Chief among the latter was Ezra the Scribe. He was slight in natural stature, which was further diminished by the bowing weight of years. Long grey forelocks hung down from his temples and mingled with his beard. His forehead was high and straight. His face showed the incipient emaciation of advancing years, being sunken beneath the cheek-bones. Restless grey eyes twinkled in their deep setting, and suggested his undiminished brightness of intelligence. His whole aspect betokened great amiability and kindness of disposition, united, however, with rigid firmness of conviction and powers of patient endurance. One who was over-critical in reading the countenance might perhaps have pronounced it lacking in indications of that self-assertion and daring which fit a man for leadership in troublous times. Marduk said to himself: "That man would never make a soldier; though he might make a martyr."

The Scribe was accompanied by two young men. One was Malachi, whose face, though not beautiful, was strangely prepossessing. The deep weather-tinge did not take from it a sunny brightness, a sort of translucency due to habitual high and pure thinking. His head, however, seemed to over-weight his body. His eyes were large, and wide open; and, while really fixed upon one's face, gave the impression of being focused upon something beyond or within one. His brows were heavy, and, at times, seemed to project until they dropped new shadows upon his face, whose lines contracted under the intensity of painful thoughts. As Marduk afterwards noticed, Malachi was often absent-minded; indeed, was never entirely otherwise. While engaging freely in conversation, he was never fully engaged by what was said; and, though he contributed more than most men to the elucidation of various subjects, one felt that he reserved more than he gave; that he was a critic rather than a participant in what was going on. He seemed to be two persons; the greater personality unexpressed, but observant and waiting.

Marduk was not surprised at the inn-keeper's information that Malachi was the favourite pupil of Ezra, and that the Scribe did not hesitate to pronounce the young man's spiritual discernment as something akin to the prophetic gift. He even had said that, when he prayed for the renovation of Israel, he could not avoid associating his hopes in some way with the career of his young disciple.

Malachi's companion was in every respect diverse. Marduk noticed first of all this man's fine physique. He was robust and muscular; round-headed; red haired; rollicking, yet quick tempered, impudent at one moment and apologetic the next. For instance, while Malachi reverently bowed his head, and waited until Ezra was first seated on his beast before mounting his own, his young comrade seemed to forget his obeisance, and, without ceremony, almost lifted the Scribe in his strong arms, and placed him in the high saddle upon the rump of the ass. Then, at a bound he was astride his own restless charger.

Solomon Ben Eli whispered to Marduk that this young man was Manasseh, grandson of the High Priest Eliashib; who might one day come into that office himself—that is, if he could curb his restless disposition as effectively as he curbed his steed.

The good host also ventured the further information that Ezra loved Manasseh, and had said that he was "only like the Sea of Galilee, which often hides its transparent depth beneath a ruffled surface."

Solomon added to this his own criticism: "If Manasseh once settles down, he will make just the man to reform Israel. He has immense will and courage, and draws the best young blood of Jerusalem with him. But if he does not change, he will be only like a stout centre-pole of a tent that is not well set, tottering in the wind, and endangering the whole, however strong may be the cords and stakes. It is a pity that he and Malachi cannot be rolled into one, be thoroughly mixed, and then be evenly divided into two again, as the flour and the butter in the making of two cakes."

Solomon parted with his guests, as they passed from his gate, with that versatile courtesy which innkeepers and politicians alone acquire to perfection. He reverently kissed the hand of the Scribe. He bowed with great respect to Malachi. He gave Manasseh a whisper that provoked his merriest laugh. But he pressed his hand heartily with Marduk's—perhaps the sensation of the merchant's generous darts had not yet left his own palm.

The cavalcade once on the road, Ezra made his grateful acknowledgment to the Phœnician for the use of his beast.

"I would you had selected a nobler animal!" said Marduk, smiling at the picture of the greatest man of the Jewish nation scuppered with a donkey-punching stick, having declined the service of an attendant to propel the beast from behind.

"The little ass and I will be good friends," replied Ezra, facetiously. "His short steps will not jostle my thoughts. An attendant might make havoc in my meditations by punching him at an unfortunate moment."

Then he more seriously added "Know, good Marduk, that

the ass is a most honourable beast. There is a prediction among us Hebrews that, when our Great King shall come, he will make his triumphant entry into Jerusalem riding upon an ass. And, besides," resuming his pleasant, "our Psalmist says, 'A horse is a vain thing for safety,' as you will be apt to find out before we get through the rocky ravine between this and Enshemesh, unless your steed's feet have been trained like those of the goats."

"I am told that the way before us is noted for the license taken by robbers," said Marduk. "My company will therefore be a safe escort."

"I accept your company heartily," replied Ezra, "but will need no protection. It is now many years since I came from Babylon. I then refused to ask of the Great King an escort of soldiers, for the hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him. From that day I have never borne a weapon, nor had an armed attendant. I have gone safely throughout the land, and even among the Jews scattered abroad, and have found no evil; nor will I ever."

"But the route we are taking will be of interest to you, I think, without the hazard of carnal adventure. The deep gorge we are entering, and up which we must climb some three thousand cubits before we reach the high ground of Olivet, takes its name from the brook Cherith, and is famous as having been the hiding-place of our prophet Elijah, where he was fed by ravens during a terrible famine that came upon our land according to his prediction. It was during the reign of King Ahab and his Sidonian wife, Jezebel, a priestess of Ashtaroth who made Israel to sin in following Baal. But pardon this unkind allusion to the worship of your people. I would not wound another's convictions, however strongly I might hold my own."

"Do not apologize for it," replied Marduk. "One should speak of his faith freely in his own land, and I think also in all lands. Therefore, I venture to make an argument for the Phœnician faith, assuming the recent news from the coast to be true. Your land is famous for its miracles, but Tyre just now seems the special arena for divine exploits."

"You refer, doubtless, to the alleged translation of King Hiram?" replied Ezra. "I have not investigated the story; nor do I think one needs to do so in order to judge of it. It is, even in its own assumption, totally different from the miracles of Israel. Ours were openly wrought by God, with His high hand and outstretched arm. All people could judge them; as the dividing waters of the Red Sea and Jordan, the sun standing still in heaven, and the like. But the marvel of Tyre was wrought, I am told, within a cordon of priests who carefully surrounded the place. Now, a miracle wrought for priests is apt to be a priest-wrought miracle. But—"

The conversation was interrupted by Marduk's horse suddenly taking fright, losing his footing on the narrow path, and nearly precipitating its rider into the brook Cherith, which gleamed, a tiny thread of white water, far below. As by dexterous management he enabled the horse to recover himself, Marduk laughingly admitted that he was enough of a Jew now to believe the Psalmist's saying about the horse being a vain thing for safety, at least in such places as this.

"But what have we here?" he cried, leaping from his beast. "This earth did not give way itself. The path has been dug under, and only the surface shell left. It is a prepared avalanche; and, by the rays of Baal! there is an ambushment below. See! the villains are skulking back into the hills. They were to tumble us and our baggage down there, and then pluck us at their leisure."

Ezra raised his hands in prayer, and repeated: "We thank Thee, O Lord, for the fulfilment of Thy promise through Thy servant Moses: 'Surely He shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler. He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.'"

The Phœnician was as much impressed with the beauty and tranquility of the Scribe's faith as with the horrible catastrophe that had so nearly overwhelmed them, especially as he recalled Ezra's statement that his God had always delivered him.

CHAPTER XX.

From this point of the journey Marduk insisted on riding ahead with Manasseh, lest new dangers might await them. That sort of clairvoyance which generous souls have in detecting congenial spirits quickly put these two young men at ease with each other. Their horses were not unmatched in strength and nerve, and caught from their riders a sense of good-fellowship. Scarcely waiting their master's will, they dashed together up the steep ascents, raced across the open spaces, and waited impatiently, with tossing manes and pawing hoofs for the laggard train. Their riders ran many a tilt of wit and braggadocio, rivalling each other in their stories of adventure. The merchant related exploits in many lands; enough to have made the reputation of a veteran soldier, sailor, and merchant combined.

"It is a pity you are not a Jew," said Manasseh. "We have some quick blood at Jerusalem that would mix well with yours. You see this dagger?" tossing a bright blade into the air, and catching it deftly by the handle. "Father Ezra there does not know that his good boy goes armed. I keep this just as a memento of an escapade some of us youngsters made from the walls of Jerusalem one night. We sacked a camp of Samaritans who had come too near us and blocked the road to the north gate. Every day these half-breed marauders sent some insult to our people; but never after that night. Nehemiah, our governor, thought that he and Ezra had prayed them away; and so these saints stole our credit."

"I am part Jew," replied Marduk, "for I belong to all nations. See, here are my credentials!" producing a handful of coins. "The golden ring of Egypt, the double-stater of Greece, the daric of Persia, and the shekel of you Jews. One metal, many shapes; so man is one, nations and customs many; and, for all that you and I know, one God, and many notions of Him. El, Bel, Baal, Jove, Jehovah, the same metal in thought, but stamped with different dies. All gods are one."

"Say rather that One God is all," interposed Malachi, who had ridden up just in time to catch the last sentence.

The party halted for rest and lunch at the upper end of the ravine of Cherith. The travellers were awed into silence by the view here presented. The ravine is a jagged cut in the earth, nearly five hundred cubits deep, in places scarcely wider than the tiny brook that glides like a shining serpent at

its bottom, and winds down, with a thousand turns, for miles, until it debouches between awful cliffs into the open valley of the Jordan.

Refreshments were furnished from the well-stocked hampers of the merchant. The mules and horses were unladen and tethered. The ungainly camels crouched down for relief under their loads. After an hour's rest the Jews proposed to take their leave of their kind patron of the road, and hasten on to Jerusalem. The merchant's beasts should not be hurried, but Manasseh avowed that Ezra would rather die of exhaustion on the road than be left outside the gates of Jerusalem after sunset on this particular night, which was that of the preparation for the great Feast of Tabernacles.

The parting of Marduk and Manasseh was not until the latter had exacted a promise from the Phœnician that he would become his guest while in the city. The Jews joined with others of their nation, pilgrims to the city, who had halted for mid day rest, and who now made their way towards Enshemesh joyous with their songs, such as:—

"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem, whither the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord."

Scarcely had the pilgrims disappeared over the hill-tops when two men were observed climbing up through the ravine. They rode upon mules. One was old; the other a stalwart youth. Eliezar, the Damascene steward of Marduk's camp, recognized the elder one as he drew near, and ran out to meet him.

"Why, it is Ben Yusef of Giscaia! And this is the fine lad whom I last saw the height of a kid! The air of Galilee grows big men, as it grows big hills."

"But what brings Eliezar here?" asked Ben Yusef. "Was not the northern country of Syria large enough for the sale of your merchandise?"

In a few words Eliezar narrated how that, from being a private peddler of such goods as a meagre purse could buy, he had come to be the viceroy, satrap, tirshatha, prime minister, or whatever term of speech might suit the office, of no less notable a merchant than Marduk, famed in many lands for his great enterprise—Marduk of Tyre.

"Of Tyre!" exclaimed Ben Yusef. "Then Elnathan and I would speak with him."

Marduk had eyed the new-comers with that keenness which a merchant acquires in recognizing the sort of men it will pay to deal with, and had turned away to give orders for the reloading of his beasts, but approached the strangers on hearing Ben Yusef's remark.

"I am Marduk of Tyre, and your servant," said he, bowing with indifferent courtesy.

"My lad has acquaintance there, of which he would enquire," replied the old man.

Elnathan walked a little way with Marduk; and, as they turned, the latter was heard to say:—

"I can give no information, for my route has been from Egypt across the desert of Arabia. Nor can I offer you encouragement, since it may be some moons yet before I again visit the coast. But if your Galilean flocks are well fleeced we may some day strike a bargain for their wool."

Ben Yusef and his son, with suitable apologies for their intrusion upon the great merchant's privacy, and with familiar parting from Eliezar, went their way towards Jerusalem. Marduk's party followed.

(To be continued.)

THE MISSIONARY WORLD.

THE RECENT RIOTS IN CHINA AND THEIR REMEDY.

The evangelization of China is the greatest enterprise before the Christian Church. Its inhabitants are usually estimated at nearly one-fourth of the earth's population. As colonizers the Chinese almost rival the Anglo-Saxons. They are supplanting the feeble races of Eastern Asia, and stringent measures have had to be adopted to prevent their swarming into the United States and Australia.

China is remarkable for its system of competitive examinations for office. The first grade of scholarship is called "Budding Genius." Once in three years the "budding geniuses" proceed to the provincial capital to pass for the second degree, that of "Promoted Scholars." The latter, after a certain time, assemble at Peking for the third grade, "Ready for Office."

The number of competitors at these examinations is estimated at two millions. The course of instruction is well fitted to develop the national pride and overweening self-conceit, which are Chinese characteristics. The works of Confucius are the chief objects of study. When a boy enters school, he prostrates himself before the tablet of Confucius, who is said to be the "teacher of ten thousand ages," "the equal of heaven and earth." China is the "Central Flower Land," the inhabitants of other countries are "outside barbarians" and "foreign devils." The common people are generally not unfriendly to Europeans; but it is different with many of the literati, who will sometimes show their dislike to a missionary by covering their noses with their long sleeves at the sight of him, as if the smell was unbearable.

Until about half a century ago the few foreigners in China were shut up within the suburbs of a single city, under close surveillance. When this restriction was removed missionaries began to enter the country. There are now about 1,300 foreign missionaries, male and female, in the field. In 1842 there were only six Chinese Protestant Christians; Communicants now number about 40,000.

The literati dislike all foreigners, but missionaries are especially obnoxious for their audacity in presuming to teach the disciples of Confucius. Their hatred is increased also at witnessing the spread of the Gospel. The means adopted to check the progress of the early Church have been repeated in China. Tertullian says, in his famous "Apology for the Christian Religion," "It is the common talk that