

Pen Pictures of Great Prophets

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II. ELISHA

A young Israelitish farmer is plowing, with his father's servants,—eleven yoke of oxen they are working, and he the twelfth,—in one of the rich, level fields of the "Valley of the Dance". Suddenly Elijah, the famous prophet of the wild mountains and the lonely desert, comes into the field from the highway and casts his mantle over Elisha's shoulders. The plowman is thus called to be a prophet. He delays the following of his new master only long enough to bid his parents and friends farewell.

It may have been half a score years later that Elisha took up the mantle of Elijah as he was carried to heaven by the whirlwind, and by smiting the Jordan waters apart with it, proved himself the successor to the leadership of the prophets.

Elisha was Elijah's successor ; but he was not Elijah. God never casts two of His servants in the same mold. Elijah was a hardy son of the desert, delighting in its vast solitudes ; Elisha loved human companionship and the joys of home. Elijah was a stern warrior, fighting brave battles against the evils of his time ; Elisha spent the days of his long life in uncounted deeds of mercy.

We can scarcely think of Elisha apart from some of those whom his kindness blessed. There is the woman of Shunem, who provided for him the roof chamber in her house, and who received through him the precious gift of a son, and, when the child died, received him back again from the dead through the same mighty servant of God. And there is the Syrian Naaman, a victorious general, beloved of his sovereign, honored by his country,—but a leper. A leper, but the glimmer of hope, brought into his darkened home through the coming of the Israelitish slave maiden soon brightened into the sunshine of perfect healing through the loving ministry of Israel's prophet.

Like his master, Elisha had much to do with kings. But he entered their palaces, not as a foe but as a friend. They used to call him "father". They came to seek his advice in war and to consult him in sickness. To kings, as well as to common folk,

he showed himself to be a willing, kindly helper, as full of sympathy as of power.

With all his gentleness, however, Elisha was no weakling. He could, when occasion required it, be as stern as Elijah. He refused to speak to Jehoram, the king of Israel, that "son of a murderer". He devised the plan that led to the overthrow of Ahab's wicked line. In such ways as these he fulfilled the prophecy, "him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay".

Elijah is the prophet who shows us how to contend valiantly against evil. He inspires us to face any peril or loss in the cause of right and truth. But Elisha teaches us to make the common ways of life beautiful with helpful deeds. He is the prophet of the home and the street and the workshop. In the art of making people happy he is among the great masters of all the ages.

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Syrian Husetops

In Syria in summer the family sleep upon the husetop. Says Dr. Tristram, "In humbler families the master of the house locked the door below, and followed us up the steps to the roof of the empty house." Sometimes there is a guest chamber on the roof, such a chamber as the woman of Shunem had her husband build for the prophet "on the wall". That means that the "chamber" was reached from the outside by steps on the wall, so that the prophet might be free to go and come, and to have privacy. Tristram tells us of such guest chambers in Syrian towns now. A room like this could be reached, just as the prophet's room at Shunem, by outer steps without the observation or knowledge of the inmates of the dwelling. An outside staircase to an Oriental house is quite common.

Dr. Shaw states that, in Barbary, the stairs are sometimes placed in the porch, sometimes at the entrance into the court, when there is one or more stories, and are afterwards continued through one corner or other of the gallery to the top of the house, whither they conduct us through a door. "We may go up or come down by the staircase without entering into any of the offices or apartments, or interfering with the business of the house."—Rice's, *Orientalisms in Bible Lands*