

The Coward.

Who is coward? Who?
The boy who cannot bear
A hardy word, a scornful look,
A thoughtless jest, a damaged book;
Whose selfish spirit cannot brook
The play he may not share.

Who is coward? Who?
He who would rather fight
Than own that he is in the wrong,
Or curb his wild, unruly tongue;
Who rather would be fierce and strong,
Than kind and just and right.

Who is coward? Who?
The boy who never craves
For grace to help him to refrain
From taking God's own name in vain,
But idly follows in the train
Of Satan's willing slaves.

Who is coward? Who?
He who dares not refuse
To join in every evil way
With those who seek to lead astray;
The boy who is ashamed to pray,
Afraid the right to choose.

THE BOY DISCIPLE.

BY

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CHAPTER XIV.

It was with a deep feeling of relief that the two families watched the Master go away into Perea. Phineas still kept with him. As the little band disappeared down the street, Ruth hid her face in her mother's dress and began to cry.

"I don't want my father to go away again!" she sobbed. Abigail took her in her lap and tried to comfort her, although there were tears in her own eyes.

"We will go home soon, little daughter, and then father will be with us all the time. But we must wait first, till after the cold, rainy season, and the Feast of Dedication."

"What! another feast?" asked Jesse, to whom the summer had seemed one long confusion of festivals. "Don't they have lots of them down in this country? What's this one for?"

"Grandfather will tell you," answered his mother. "Run out and ask him for the story. I know you will like it."

Seated on his grandfather's knee, Jesse doubled up his little fists, as he heard how a heathen altar had once been set up on the great altar of burnt-offering, and a heathen general had driven a herd of swine through the holy Temple, making it unclean. But his breath came quick, and his eyes shone, as the proud old Israelite told him of Judas the Macabee, Judas the lion-hearted, who had whipped the Syrian soldiers, purified the Temple, and dedicated it anew to the worship of Jehovah.

"Our people never forget their heroes," ended the old man. "Every year, in every home, no matter how humble, one candle is lighted at the beginning of the feast; the next night, two, and the next night, three, and so on, till eight candles shine out into the winter darkness."

"For so the brave deeds of the Macabees burn in the memory of every child of Abraham!"

The feast came and went. While the candles burned in every home, and the golden lamps in the great Temple blazed a welcome, the Nazarene came back to his Father's house, to be once more about his Father's business.

Joel caught a glimpse of him walking up and down the covered porches in front of the Gate Beautiful. The next moment he was pushing and elbowing his way through the jostling crowds, till he stood close beside him.

After that, the services that followed were a blank. He saw only one face,—the face that had looked into his beside the Galilee, and drawn from his heart its intensest love. He heard only one voice,—the voice he had longed for all these weeks and days. Just to be near him! To be able to reach out reverent fingers and only touch the clothes he wore; to look up in his face, and look and look with a love that never wearied,—that was such happiness that Joel was lost to everything else!

But after a while he began to realize that it was for no friendly purpose that the chief priests came pressing around with questions.

"If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly," they demanded. Then up and down through the long Porch of Solomon, among all its white marble pillars, they repeated his answer:

"The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. I and my Father are one!"

"Blasphemy!" shouted a mocking voice behind him. "Blasphemy!" echoed Pharisee and Sadducee, for once agreed. The crowds pushed and shoved between the pillars; some ran out for stones. In the confusion of the uproar, as they turned to lay violent hands on him, he slipped out of their midst, and went quietly away.

Joel hunted around awhile for the party he had come with, but seeing neither Phineas nor Lazarus, started back to Bethany on the run. A cold winter rain had begun to fall.

None of Reuben's family had gone into Jerusalem that day on account of the weather, but were keeping the feast at home.

They were startled when the usually quiet boy burst excitedly into the house, and told them what he had just seen.

"O mother Abigail!" he cried, throwing himself on his knees beside her. "If he goes away again may I not go with him? I cannot go back to Galilee and leave him, unknowing what is to happen. If he is to be persecuted and driven out, and maybe killed, let me at least share his suffering, and be with him at the last!"

"You forget that he has all power, and that his enemies can do him no harm," said Abigail, gently. "Has he not twice walked out unharmed, before their very eyes, when they would have taken him? And besides, what good could you do, my boy? You forget that you are only a child, and might not be able to stand the hardships of such a journey."

"I am almost fourteen," said Joel, stretching himself up proudly. "And I am as strong now as some of the men who go with him. He gave me back my strength, you know. Oh, you do not know how I love him!" he cried. "When I am away from him, I feel as you would were you separated from Jesse and Ruth and father Phineas. My heart is always going out after him!"

"Child, have you no care for us?" she responded reproachfully.

"Oh, do not speak so!" he cried, catching up her hand and kissing it. "I do love you; I can never be grateful enough for all you have done for me. But, O mother Abigail, you could never understand! You were never lame and felt the power of his healing. You were never burning with a wicked hatred, and felt the balm of his forgiveness! You cannot understand how he draws me to him!"

"Let the boy have his way," spoke up Reuben. "I, too, have felt that wonderful power that draws all men to him. Gladly would I part with every shekel I possess, if I thereby might win him the favour of the authorities."

When once more a little band of fugitives followed their Master across the Jordan, Joel was with them.

The winter wore away, and they still tarried. Day by day, they were listening to the simple words that dropped like seeds into their memories, to spring up in after months and bear great truths. Now they heard them as half-understood parables,—the good Samaritan, the barren fig-tree, the prodigal son, the unjust steward.

There was one story that thrilled Joel deeply,—the story of the lost sheep. For he recalled that stormy night in the sheepfold of Nathan ben Obed, and the shepherd who searched till dawn for the straying lamb.

It was only long afterwards that he realized it was the Good Shepherd himself who told the story, when he was about to lay down his own life for the lost sheep of Israel.

Meanwhile in Bethany, Rabbi Reuben and his wife rejoiced that their daughter's visit stretched out indefinitely.

Jesse openly declared that he intended to stay there always, and learn to be a goldsmith like his grandfather.

Ruth, too, was happy and contented,

and seemed to have forgotten that she ever had any other home. As the early spring days came on, she lived almost entirely out in the sunshine. She had fallen into the habit of standing at the gate to watch for Lazarus every evening when he came back from the Temple. As soon as she saw him turn the corner into their street, she ran to meet him, her fair curls and white dress fluttering in the wind.

No matter how tired he was, or what cares rested heavily on his mind, the pale face always lighted up, and his dark eyes smiled at her coming.

"Lazarus does not seem well, lately," she heard Martha say to her mother one day. "I have been trying to persuade him to rest a few days; but he insists he cannot until he has finished the scroll he is illuminating."

A few days after that he did not go to the city as usual. Ruth peeped into the darkened room where he was resting on a couch; his eyes were closed, and he was so pale it almost frightened her.

He did not hear her when she tiptoed into the room and out again; but the fragrance of the little stemless rose she laid on his pillow aroused him. He opened his eyes and smiled languidly, as he caught sight of her slipping noiselessly through the door.

Her mother, sewing by the window, looked out and saw her running across the street. Jesse was out in front of the house, playing with a ball.

"Who is that boy talking to Jesse?" asked Abigail of Rebecca, who stood in the doorway, holding out her arms as Ruth came up.

"Why, that is little Joseph, the only son of Simon the leper. Poor child!"

"Simon the leper," repeated Abigail. "A stranger to me."

"Surely not. Have you forgotten the wealthy young oil-seller who lived next the synagogue? He has the richest olive groves in this part of the country."

"Not the husband of my little playmate Esther?" cried Abigail. "Surely he has not been stricken with leprosy?"

"Yes; it is one of the saddest cases I have ever heard of. It seems so terrible for a man honoured as he has been, and accustomed to every luxury, to be such a despised outcast."

"Poor Esther!" sighed Abigail. "Does she ever see him?"

"Not now. The disease is fast destroying him; and he is such a hideous sight that he has forbidden her to ever try to see him again. Even his voice is changed. Of course he would be stoned if he were to come back. He never seeks the company of other lepers. She has had a room built for him away from the sight of men. Every day a servant carries him food and tidings. It is well that they have money, or he would be obliged to live among the tombs with others as repulsive-looking as himself, and such company must certainly be worse than none. Sometimes little Joseph is taken near enough to speak to him, that he may have the poor comfort of seeing his only child at a distance."

"What if it were my Phineas!" exclaimed Abigail, her tears dropping fast on the needlework she held. "Oh, it is a thousand times worse than death!"

Out in the street the boys were making each other's acquaintance in the off-hand way boys of that age have.

"My name is Jesse. What's yours?"

"Joseph."

"Where do you live?"

"Around the corner, next to the synagogue."

"My father is a carpenter. What's yours?"

Joseph hesitated. "He used to be an oil-seller," he said finally. "He doesn't do anything now."

"Why?" persisted Jesse.

"He is a leper now," was the reluctant answer.

A look of distress came over Jesse's face. He had seen some lepers once, and the sight was still fresh in his mind. As they were riding down from Galilee, Joel had pointed them out to him. A group of beggars with horrible scaly sores that had eaten away their flesh, till some were left without lips or eyelids; one held out a deathly white hand from which nearly all the fingers had dropped. Their hair looked like white wire, and they called out, in shrill,

cracked voices, "Unclean! Unclean! Come not near us!"

"How terrible to have one's father like that," thought Jesse. A lump seemed to come up in his throat; his eyes filled with tears at the bare idea. Then, boy-like, he tossed up his ball, and forgot all about it in the game that followed.

Several days after he met Joseph and a servant, who was carrying a large, covered basket and a water-bottle made of skin.

"I'm going to see my father, now," said Joseph. "Ask your mother if you can come with me."

Jesse started towards his home, then turned suddenly. "No, I'm not going to ask her, for she'll be sure to say no. I am just going anyhow."

"You'll catch it when you get home!" exclaimed Joseph.

"Well, it cannot last long," reasoned Jesse, whose curiosity had gotten the better of him. "I believe I'd rather take a whipping than not to go."

Joseph looked at him in utter astonishment.

"Yes, I would," he insisted; "so come on!"

A short walk down an unfrequented road, in the direction of Jericho, took them to a lonely place among the bare cliffs. A little cabin stood close against the rocks, with a great sycamore-tree bending over it. Near by was the entrance to a deep cave, always as cool as a cellar, even in the hottest summer days.

At the mouth of the cave sat Simon the leper. He stood up when he saw them coming, and wrapped himself closely in a white linen mantle that covered him from head to foot. It was a ghostly sight to Jesse; but to Joseph, so long accustomed to it, there seemed nothing strange.

At a safe distance the servant emptied his basket on a large flat rock, and poured the water into a stone jar standing near. Last of all, he laid a piece of parchment on the stone. It was Esther's daily letter to her exiled husband.

No matter what storms swept the valley, or what duties pressed at home, that little missive was always sent. She had learned to write for his sake. By all his friends he was accounted dead; but her love, stronger than death, bridged the gulf that separated them. She lived only to minister to his comfort as best she could.

Simon did not send as long a message (in return, as his trusted messenger usually carried. He had much to say to his boy, and the sun was already high.

Jesse, lagging behind in the shelter of the rock, heard the tender words of counsel and blessing that came from the white-sheeted figure with a feeling of awe.

As the father urged his boy to be faithful to every little duty, careful in learning the prayers, and above all obedient to his mother, Jesse's conscience began to prick him sorely.

"I believe I know somebody that could cure him," he said, as they picked their way over the rocks, going home.

"Cause He made Joel well."

"Who's Joel?" asked Joseph.

"A boy that lives with us. He was just as lame, and limped away when he walked. Now he is as straight as I am. All the sick people where I lived went to him, and they got well."

Joseph shook his head. "Lepers can't be cured. Can they, Seth?" he asked, appealing to the servant.

"No, lepers are just the same as dead," answered Seth. "There's no help for them."

Jesse was in a very uncomfortable frame of mind, as hot and dusty he left his companion and dragged home, at a snail's pace.

Next morning Joseph was waiting for him out in front. "Well, did she whip you?" he asked, with embarrassing frankness.

"No," said Jesse, a little sheepishly. "She put me to bed just as soon as I had eaten my dinner, and made me stay there till this morning."

(To be continued.)

Bixby—"What idiots girls are when they imitate men." Marine (battered):—"Do you think so?" That proves how excellent the imitation is."