

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 XXXIII.

As Hanno, under the terebinth of Ben Yusef, narrated the substance of all this to Hiram and Zillah, he bade them feel the tough leathern suit, like that of a Phœnician soldier, in which he had disguised himself. The stiffness of the leather served to hide its uneven thickness, for its lining was quilted in tiny blocks, each of which was nubbled with some precious stone, or padded to protect some delicate setting or cluster of gems. He twisted a bit of iron from the end of his sword-hilt, and poured out a handful of diamonds. He mimicked the tricksters who draw pearls from various parts of their bodies, except that he left the pearls and emeralds and rubies in the hand of Zillah, and possessed no power of the wizard to make them vanish. He grew hilarious.

"Come!" said he. "Let us play the chase by the robber. I will be the victim. You shall catch me and take me to your own den—the booth over there—and slay me alive—for all this skin belongs to you."

But Zillah could not be provoked into mirth. Hanno, in narrating the events that followed her escape from Apheca, had not told her of her father's curse, reserving that part of the story for Hiram's ears alone. She was oppressed by what she thought of as her own unfilial conduct; and in her mind Hanno's zealous interest in their behalf had led him into robbery. Hiram's sympathy with her awakened scruples in his own mind that perhaps he would not otherwise have thought of.

"I cannot take these things, good Hanno," said he.

"Why not? They are yours, and have been for more than twenty moons. Indeed, you should not only take them, but demand usury on them, too. Recall Ahimelek's dowry contract with yourself. You told me it was for a thousand minas, and for a half of all the revenues of his ships; the same as this contract with Rubaal. By the laws of Tyre all this comes with your bride. That he villainously sought to kill you, to break his daughter's heart, does not touch this fact under law, however it may affect your feelings. I did not steal these things from him, for they were not his, and have not been since the day of your betrothal, or if there were any doubt of that, they are not his since your marriage. And, by the name of Jehovah, into whose land you have come, to no other hands than yours shall they be given! Besides, you are not merely Hiram and Zillah; you are the king and queen of Tyre. They belong to your throne. Loyalty to your throne compels your retention of them."

"Nay," said Zillah, "your own pledge was to put them into some temple, under the protection of the god."

"The true temple of God is a man, and that temple's true revenues are the man's rights," said Hanno, oracularly. "I will fulfil my pledge best if I leave them at your feet, and go back to Tyre. I will then kiss my hand to the sun, and swear I have done my duty."

"Hold!" interrupted Hiram; "it may be that Manasseh can help us in the matter. He is of the priestly line, and perhaps can find a safe place in connection with the temple at Jerusalem. We need a better guarded treasury than our pockets. Put you have not asked the news from Samaria that the messenger who accompanied you brought. I will read it:—

"*Manasseh, son of Josada, of the tribe of Levi, to Marduk, son of Baal, and to my lady Zillah. Greeting.*"

"My wedding with Nicaso, daughter of Sanballat, satrap of Samaria, will be on the seventeenth day of the seventh month, which is Tishri. My lord Sanballat bids me welcome you among his most honoured guests. My own summons may be best read in your thoughts, O my friend, for thou knowest my heart. My salutations to Elnathan and the house of Ben Yusef!"

The following day the Phœnician party left the hospitable home of their Jewish host. They proceeded southward by the Sea of Galilee, striking the road that leads by Mount Tabor. They encamped for the night near the western slope of that beautiful mountain. The sunlight that lingered on its symmetrical crest when the dusk filled the plain about them they interpreted into good omen, notwithstanding that it was a superstition or religion of the sun-god.

As the morning broke, they observed that a large camp of Persian soldiers had been formed near them during the night. Enquiry revealed the fact that this was the escort of Nehemiah, the Tirshatha of Jerusalem, who was coming from Susa, where he had been for several years, having assumed that the affairs of Jerusalem were sufficiently settled to allow his return to the Persian capital—a place that, although he was a Jew, still held many of his interests, and where he was allotted a high rank as the former cup-bearer of the king.

The Tirshatha was accompanied by a detachment of Persian cavalry, whose horses were tethered between the tents. By the central pavilion stood the tall spear; floating from its head the ensign of the commandant. Smoke wreathed from a score of fires, where the morning meal was being prepared.

At a sudden bugle blast the entire scene was transformed. The tents fell; the fire was trampled out; horses were harnessed; camels knelt to receive their burdens. In a few moments the gallant cavalcade, followed by the baggage train, and guarded at the rear by a detachment of horsemen, crowded the road.

As they passed the camp of the Phœnicians, now ready for the journey, the Tirshatha sent his messenger to learn who were his neighbours. Upon hearing they were merchants, he bade them join his party, and invited Marduk to ride by his side.

The Tirshatha was mounted upon a superb horse, equipped with expensive trappings embossed with gold, his bridle of silk inwoven with threads of gold; the saddle cloth a rich purple embroidered in gold. The rider's habit was in

keeping. His purple tunic was adorned with flower-work, as were his flowing trousers. His sword-hilt was of gold, studded with gems. A massive chain of gold was about his neck. He wore the conical cap projecting forward at the top, as if to make a shade for the face. The officers of his suite were in array approximating in splendour that of their chief.

Marduk returned the cordial salutation of the Tirshatha as he rode up to his side.

Nehemiah opened the conversation genially.

"Marduk, a Phœnician merchant? The name is new to me, except that on this journey I have heard it spoken with respect. I thought I knew all of your trade who were accustomed to visit our Jews' land."

As he said this he gave a quick glance with penetrating eyes into the face of Marduk—a glance that took in every feature.

The Phœnician felt that there might be some suspicion in this, and deftly foiled it.

"Your people are increasing rapidly in wealth under the stimulus of your government, Tirshatha; and many merchants who used to trade elsewhere are now attracted hither. You will see many strangers at Jerusalem, my lord."

"Your compliment is more kind than considerate, replied Nehemiah. "Our people have little wealth as yet, and cannot buy much of such rare goods as you evidently carry."

"Yes, but by buying and selling my wares they make gain."

"You are going to Jerusalem, then, sir merchant?"

"To Samaria first."

"Oh! to deck out Sanballat's daughter for her wedding?" said Nehemiah, with a sneer.

"I believe she marries one of your people."

"Yes, but it is most ill-advised," replied Nehemiah, with undisguised ill-humour.

"How? Any alliance between Samaria and Jerusalem must strengthen both."

"Nay, it is an alliance of clay and iron that makes the iron brittle. Our people, Marduk, are of peculiar customs, religion, and mission. Again and again have our old kings tried to widen their prosperity by widening their alliances, but have always failed. The Persian government is wiser. It does not seek to make all the provinces it conquers to be alike in their laws and worship. It allows each nation to retain its own, and only asks loyalty and tribute. King Cyrus commissioned us to return from Babylon and rebuild the temple. So did Darius, and so Artaxerxes has sent Ezra the Scribe and myself to reconstruct our own peculiar system. We condemn no other people by maintaining the pure blood of our own. Over yonder is the ruin of the palace of Jezreel. You know the place, perhaps its history. One of our kings, Ahab, married Jezebel, daughter of one of your kings of Tyre; but it wrought only trouble. We are now crossing the great battle-plain of E. Israel. Every Jew thrills at its sacred memories. Deborah and Barak here conquered Sisera, the general of the Canaanites. Yonder is Gilboa, where Saul and Jonathan fell fighting the Philistines; and there is the valley of Jezreel, where Gideon vanquished the Midianites. All these were battles for our integrity as a people, and especially that no other God than ours should be worshipped in our land. Even a Phœnician, with your legends of a thousand years, must respect the lessons of our history. But let us not dispute, Marduk. What is the news of your country by the sea? Will Rubaal get and keep the crown, think you?"

"Why not?" asked the merchant.

"At Susa he is not thought of with favour," said Nehemiah. "The sacrifice of the former king, Hiram, is regarded as a cruelty that Persia must frown upon, even if she allows freedom of religion; and the other Phœnician kings are afraid of the precedent of allowing the priests to have such influence that a king's life is in their hands. Therefore the kings are all opposed to Rubaal, and the Great King would not antagonize them. He depends too much upon the Phœnician fleet to alienate their loyalty."

The Tirshatha plied Marduk with questions regarding all the lands adjacent, the condition of roads, names of the chief men in the towns across the Jordan, to which questions the merchant gave uncomfortably meagre responses. His ignorance occasionally brought those keen eyes of Nehemiah to a suspicious scrutiny of his countenance.

As they parted company, the Tirshatha remarked to his chief officer:—

"That man knows both too much and too little. Have an eye upon him."

The following day the Phœnician took the short road from Dothan to Samaria, while the Tirshatha's party kept to that running by Shechem, and leading them more directly to the Sacred City.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The hill of Samaria was in a blaze of colour. Every tent of the army of Sanballat floated its gay streamer. Rivaling these were the displays of the various chieftains of neighbouring tribes, who had come to honour with their presence the wedding of the Samaritan princess. The extravagance of Oriental fashion vied with that of martial splendour; gaudy turbans with polished helmets; brilliant robes with gleaming breastplates; palanquins of fair women with the mail of the heavy war horses. Furlongs of bright cloths hung from the trees, and draped the stone columns that still stood as the relics and reminders of the glory of this old capital of Israel. In cool nooks were skins of wines, while troughs were overrunning with the new-pressed juices of apples and grapes. There were jars of confections, spiced to kindle the thirst that the free-flowing liquors were to quench. Games, dances, songs, the thumbing of stringed instruments, the whistle of pipes and the ringing of trumpets, gave vent to the spirit of abandon among the motley crowds of people.

Sanballat entertained within the palace the great chiefs, whose spears, adorned with their various insignia, were stuck into the ground, in semicircular array, in front of the grand entrance. There was Geshom, the Arabian, and a score of braves from Idumea, Moab, and Philistia, who lounged at the tables. Even Tobiah, the Ammonite, was not forgotten; indeed, his presence was a special pleasure to Sanballat, whose magnanimity rose with the conviction that he had at length circumvented his rival in gaining alliance with the Jews. These worthies drank to one another, and to one another's gods; to the sun-god, to Baal-Shamayim, lord of heaven; to Melkarth of Tyre, to Chemosh of Moab,

to Milcom of Ammon, to Moloch of Philistia, to Dagon of the coast, to Succoth-benoth of Babylon, to Nergal of Cuth, to Ashima of Hamath, to Nibhak and Tartak of the Avites, to Adramelech and Anammelek of Sepharvaim, to Jehovah of the Jews, and to Astarte the goddess of love. With clinking cups and hilarious shouts they invoked the blessings of all gods upon the bride and groom. They drank until they knew not to whom they drank, each one making a God of his own belly. Then they bepraised every one his own possessions and prowess, and they scattered oaths and blows; indeed, all had a right merry time, as the proprieties of the occasion and the rude manners of the age and people prompted, until the soberer servants removed both the viands and the guests together.

At nightfall the hill of Samaria seemed a mass of flame. Torches flared upon the palace walks, bonfires filled the grove with ruddy light, amid which the trees and the moving people seemed like weird spectres.

A bugle blast sounded from afar. The crowds gathered near the open roadway that led to the palace. The clatter of hoofs was soon heard, nearer and nearer, louder and louder, while shouts rent the air. A band of wild riders dashed up the garlanded avenue. The soldiers and populace battled against them with waving torches, tufts of grass, and shrieks of mimic rage. The cry of the assailants was—

"Manasseh! Manasseh!"

They pressed up to the palace front. Some, dismounting, beat upon the gates. These were flung wide. In the opening stood Sanballat, surrounded by as many of his noble guests as were able to get upon their feet. With angry voice the Satrap demanded the cause of this irruption. A chorus of hoarse voices replied:—

"Nicaso! Nicaso for our Lord Manasseh!"

Sanballat parleyed with them.

"Would you rob a father of his only child?"

"Yes," was the response, "and of a hundred only children. One for each of us if they were like Nicaso." And a score of witticisms, some sharp, some scurrilous, were hurled at him.

At length, with well-feigned fear, Sanballat led forth his daughter. She was elegantly robed and crowned. A spirited horse, superbly caparisoned, was led to her side. Without awaiting the proffered assistance, Nicaso leaped upon his back. The horsemen led her captive, followed by a procession of maidens who wailed in feigned lament the fate of their comrade, amid the amorous gibes and jokes of the young men. They brought Nicaso to the happy bridegroom's tent.

Thus far they had followed the custom of the East-Jordan tribes in mimic seizure of the bride.

Nicaso, however, delighted in breaking through all proprieties. The flashing lights and shouts excited her wild blood, and, instead of dismounting to receive the embrace of her new lord, she dashed away from the crowd, crying, "Let him have me who can catch me!"

Her horse was sure-footed and keen-eyed, and galloped among rocks and through by-paths without the guidance of even the single rein that his mistress threw upon his neck. Down among the tents of the soldiers, out on the high-road towards Shechem, back through the woods, now flitting like a spectre in the darkness, now all agleam with her bejeweled crown and robe as she passed some bonfire; thus the daring girl led, and yet eluded, the pursuing crowd.

Manasseh, though surprised at this unexpected postponement of the moment when he should clasp his fair possession really admired the adventurous frolicsomeness of his bride, and accepted her challenge with equal spirit.

Was it the happy guidance of some goddess of love, or the quick eyes of Nicaso that watched his coming, that brought their horses together at two converging paths? Their beasts reared and plunged at the shock, like two waves clashing in counter seas. Nicaso's steed galloped away riderless.

Cries rose: "She is thrown!"

In fact, at the moment of the collision she had thrown herself from her horse fairly into Manasseh's arms, and, with crown awry, hair dishevelled, her black eyes flashing with merriment, a magnificent picture of wild queenly beauty, was borne by her lover to his tent.

As she jumped to the ground some portion of her clothing caught upon the trappings of the horse, and she would have fallen had not Marduk extended his arm and relieved her.

"Marduk, you have fulfilled your part of our covenant," said Manasseh. "Let me take my bride from your hand, as you took yours from mine."

The bridal pair disappeared in the nuptial tent.

For seven days the festival was kept up. Then the young Jew set out for Jerusalem with his bride. The Phœnician's party accompanied them. Nicaso's wardrobe burdened as many camels as did the merchant's wares. Among his rich robes was stored a strange article for such a collection: a heavy leathern suit of a Phœnician soldier

(To be continued.)

THE BEST AUTHORITIES,

Such as Dr. Dio Lewis, Professor Gross, and others, agree that catarrh is not a local but a constitutional disease. It therefore requires a constitutional remedy like Hood's Sarsaparilla, which effectually and permanently cures catarrh. Thousands praise it.

Hood's Pills cure liver ill, jaundice, biliousness, sick headache, constipation and all troubles of the digestive organs.

CLEVER WOMEN

quite realize that by the great law of progress something is always being brought out to make life pleasanter. The latest thing introduced is the "Health" underwear for ladies, made from the very finest Australian wool and which every good doctor in Canada agrees is a perfect safeguard against cold, whilst being at the same time well fitting, warm, and luxurious. When you go down town step into any first class dry goods store and ask to see these goods. If you do not see the word "Health" plainly stamped on the garment, don't buy it as it will not be the genuine article. They are made in special light weights, and new styles, for spring and summer wear.