

Sunday-School Advocate.

TORONTO, AUGUST 13, 1864.

A WONDERFUL OLD STORY.



ANY, many long years ago there lived in a lonely land faraway from ours a wise and mighty king. This king was renowned for his great riches, for his wisdom, and for the splendor of the buildings he erected.

Among the followers of this grand monarch was a young man remarkable for strength of body, for courage, and for activity. The king saw him, marked his high qualities, and, being charmed with his manners, appointed him to a high office and loaded him with princely honors.



The young man ought to have been very grateful to his royal master for these favors, and to have served him faithfully. But he was not. His king was growing old, and falling into many evil ways. Among other things, he taxed his people very heavily until they murmured. The young man, instead of soothing the anger of the people, encouraged their bad feelings, and sowed the seeds of rebellion in their hearts.

About this time the king heard that a noted seer had foretold the division of his kingdom, and that this young man would become king over the greater portion of it. This made his majesty very angry, and he resolved to kill his former favorite. But the young chieftain, hearing of his master's purpose, ran away, and found refuge in the court of a neighboring prince.



After a few years the old king died, and his son ascended the throne with great pomp. The exile, hearing of his sovereign's death, returned to his native land, and was present at a great assembly called together for the purpose of crowning the new king. Before the coronation, however, the people asked the young prince to promise that he would not tax them so heavily as his father had done. He was foolish enough not only to refuse, but to declare that his rule should be more vigorous. Then a large number of the chiefs of the people left the assembly in great wrath, raised the flag of rebellion, and made the returned exile—his name was Jeroboam—their king.

When Jeroboam was firmly fixed in his throne, he was afraid that if his people remained faithful to their old religion they would sooner or later want to return to their rightful king. Hoping to prevent this, he taught

them to be idolaters, forgetting that the surest way to secure his throne was to be faithful to God. He made two images of gold, dressed many of his worst subjects in the garb of priests, and called the people to a great religious festival in honor of his golden idols.

This wicked conduct made the Lord angry, and he sent an old prophet to the festival with a terrible message. Just as Jeroboam was burning incense before the altar of his false god the old seer appeared. Seeing his venerable form standing on a gentle hillock a little beyond the altar, the king paused. The prophet, looking sternly at the altar and raising his arms, said in a solemn voice:

"O altar, altar, God shall raise up a prince who shall burn the bones of thy priests upon thee!" Then, looking upon the king, he added, "As a sign of the truth of my words, your altar shall be broken, and the ashes that are upon it shall fall to the ground."

The king's anger was so fierce that he could not speak at first. Very soon, however, he recovered his voice, and turning to his warriors, pointed toward the prophet and fiercely shouted,

"Lay hold on him!"

But the soldiers did not stir, for at that moment the face of the king became paler than the ashes upon the altar. What ailed him? His arm had dried up, and he could not pull it in again. At the same instant the stone altar split apart, and the ashes of the sacrifice fell to the earth.

The king was for the moment conquered. He felt that the finger of Almighty justice had touched him. He trembled, and in piteous tones said to the prophet:

"Good man, I beseech you, pray to thy God that my hand may be restored to me again."

The seer, having no malice in his heart, did as the king wished, and the arm was instantly healed. Then the king invited the prophet to his palace, and promised to give him rich food and costly gifts. The seer refused to go, saying that if the king would give him half of his palace he would not cross its threshold or eat with him, because God had ordered him to eat nothing and not to retrace his steps, but to go straight home by another road.

The prophet then without further ceremony started for home. His duty to the king was done, and though tired with his walk and the excitement of the grand event in which he had taken so glorious a part, he trudged homeward, thinking least of all, perhaps, of further danger to himself. What had he to fear? Had he not faced and subdued an angry king? Was he not the Lord's prophet? Surely nothing could harm him.

But a more dangerous enemy than the king was following the prophet's steps. This adversary was a venerable old man riding upon an ass. This man had once been a prophet himself, and having been told by his sons of the wonders of the morning, was very anxious to have the man who had defied the proud and puissant king eat bread with him. He therefore, overtaking Jeroboam's reprovener while he was resting under the shadow of a noble oak, leaped from his ass, bowed with great respect, and said:

"Come home with me and eat bread!"

"I cannot," replied the prophet. "God bade me neither eat nor drink until I arrive at my home. Neither must I retrace my steps."

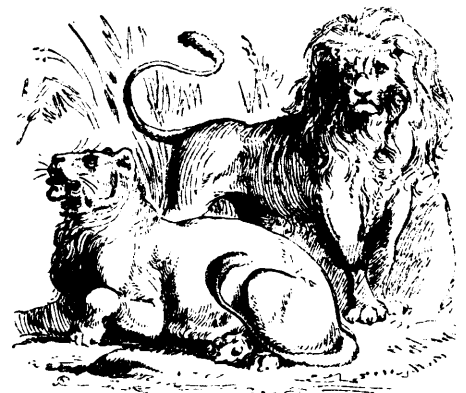
"But," rejoined the stranger, "I too am a prophet. God sent me after you and told me to bring you back. I have heard the voice of God's angel."

This was a lie; but the seer, being tired and hungry, easily persuaded himself that it was all right; and without praying to God for guidance, turned back, went to the house of the apostate prophet, and ate food.

Did he enjoy that meal? Not at all. His conscience was too busy to let him do that. God's voice also spoke within his soul, and his heart was filled with evil forebodings.

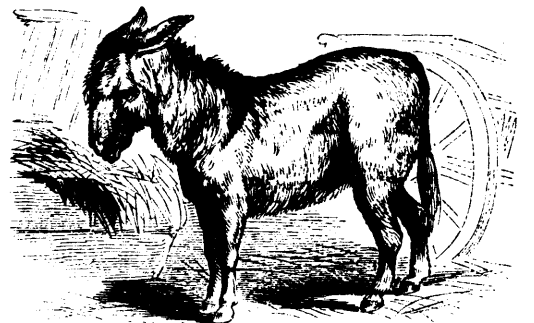
He finished his sorrowful dinner, however, and set out for home, riding upon the ass of his host, and feeling very heavy-hearted. Perhaps he asked God to forgive him as he rode slowly along the quiet roads. I hope, yes, I think he did. Presently, when near his home, he came to a wood. He had not ridden far within its shade before he heard a loud and angry growl. Starting with terror, he looked round and saw a fierce lion rushing toward him. Alas, poor prophet! His heart throbbled quickly. He had only time to breathe a brief prayer before the claws of the lion were in his flesh. He saw its glaring eyes, felt its hot breath upon his face, and then its savage jaws fastened upon his throat and he was dead!

The strangest thing of all was that after he was dead the lion dropped his hold upon his throat and placed himself like a guard beside his dead body, which had fallen



to the ground in the encounter. The royal beast neither tore the ass nor ate the body of the prophet. Was it not wonderful? God only could have made the lion act in this way.

The apostate prophet, hearing these strange things, took another ass and sought the dead body of the man he had tempted. The lion let him take it away, and he buried it in his own grave.



Thus severely did God punish the disobedience of his servant. He took his life, but I doubt not saved his soul. As for Jeroboam, he went on in his sins in spite of the awful warning he had received until God sent evil upon him, upon his children, and upon his subjects who followed his bad example.

Such is the wonderful old story. You will find it in your Bibles, and it should teach you that it is a dangerous thing to offend God; that God has ten thousand ways in which to punish you if you dare to sin; and that he deals more severely with those who know his will very clearly, as the prophet did and as you do, than with those who know very little about it.

MY LETTER-BAG.

THE wonderful old story has squeezed my budget into a small corner, so that neither the Corporal nor I have much room to air our ideas. Begin reading, Corporal!

C. S. P., of —, says:

"Sometimes the Advocate brings us a pretty little tune, and the prettiest of the pretty was, 'I love the Sunday-school.' We have sung this many, many times, and the more we sing it the more we love it. O I think we may sing this in heaven! We have been thinking much about your Try Company. What a large company you must have! We should like much to join them. We will try and learn our lessons well. We will try and behave pretty. What say you, Brother Corporal, will you try us?"

"Certainly, certainly!" replies the Corporal. "Fall in!"

FANNY M. M., of —, says:

"A little black-eyed girl of nine years, named Rosetta, who is a glad reader of your precious little Advocate, thinks it is time for her to quit the service of that 'tough old giant' *I can't*, and to commence fighting 'in the ranks of Corporal Try,' and as she has lately been victorious in several battles with 'I can't,' which shows she intends to be a good soldier, please give her name to the Corporal as a recruit."

Fanny will do first rate. The ranks of old "I can't" are thinning out grandly. Hope the old fellow will die of grief. I guess the Try Company would make merry over his tomb.—C. P., of —, says:

"I should like to tell you what my little cousin said one dark, stormy night last winter. She was going to meeting with her mother, who said she was afraid to go down a dark street. The little girl replied, 'Ma, it's only wicked folks that are afraid.' What a lesson that little girl taught in those few words!"

That little cousin's remark showed that she thought good people ought to feel safe in God's hands. She was right. They ought to feel safe, but they don't always. Let my children learn to trust in God and not yield to fears.