

The Shepherd-Prince

הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

A Historical Romance of the Days of Isaiah

By
ABRAHAM MAPU

Translated from the Hebrew by

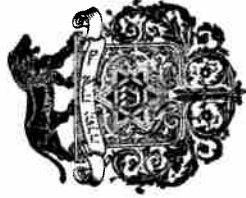
BENJAMIN A. M. SCHAPIRO

Author of

Word Studies in the Old Testament

Introduction by

ROBERT DICK WILSON, Ph.D., D.D., LL.D.



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**DEDICATED
TO
MY ESTEEMED FRIEND,
ROBERT DUN DOUGLASS, Esq.,**

WHOSE MANY YEARS' LOYALTY
AND DEVOTION TO AND APPRE-
CIATION OF WHAT IS NOBLE AND
GOOD IN MY PEOPLE, HAS BEEN
AN AID AND INSPIRATION TO ME
IN MY WORK OF PROMULGATING
THE MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION
BETWEEN JEW AND CHRISTIAN,
BY THE TRANSLATOR

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NEW AND REVISED EDITION

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Ben-Amos.....	The Prophet Isaiah
Hezekiah.....	King of Judah
King Ahaz.....	Father of Hezekiah
Sennacherib.....	King of Assyria
Nobleman Joram-ben-Abiezer.....	A Man-at-Arms
Hagith and Naomi.....	His Wives
Adoram.....	A Gentle Merchant
Prince Jedidjah.....	Treasurer to King Ahaz
Thirza.....	His Wife
Mattan.....	The Unrighteous Judge
Jozabad, The Tyrant.....	His Father
Abisai and Sithri.....	Kinsmen of Naomi
Hananel.....	Father of Thirza
Amnon and Penina.....	Children of Joram and Naomi
Theman and Thamar.....	Children of Jedidjah and Thirza
Micah of Motashti.....	The Prophet Micah
Aznkam.....	Supposed to be the son of Joram and Hagith
Achan.....	Joram's Steward
Helah.....	A Canaanitish woman, his wife
Ira.....	Hagith's Father
Chepher and Bukjah.....	Drunkards of Ephraim; Henchmen of Mattan
Zimri.....	A Priest of Baal

x DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

- Uz.....A Shepherd Friend of Amnon
- Maacah and Puah.....Thamar's Maids
- Sebna.....King Hezekiah's Chamberlain
- Rabshaka.....An Assyrian General
- Karmi.....A Wine Shop Keeper
- Pura.....Amnon's Servant
- Nabal.....Son of Achan and Helah

Judges, Sons of the Prophets, Soldiers, Shepherds,
 Watchmen on the Walls of Zion, Filgrims,
 Captives and Slaves

Place.....Jerusalem
 Time.....726 B. C.

INTRODUCTION

ROBERT DICK WILSON, PH.D., D.D., LL.D.
Professor of Semitic Languages at Princeton Theological Seminary



HE perusal of "The Shepherd-Prince," translated from the work of the famous Jewish writer of fiction, Abraham Mapu, by Mr. B. A. M. Schapiro, will show how possible it is for the spirit and "atmosphere" of a people, as well as the environment and setting of ages long past, to be brought out so vividly as to make them real to the consciousness of readers of today. To achieve this is a distinction, the height of literary art.

This work is to be warmly commended to Christian readers because it presents in graphic form the ideas of a modern Israelite with regard to the life and ideals, the emotions and aspirations, of the Ancient Chosen People.

The period of this intensely interesting love story is that of the time of Isaiah, the greatest in the long list of prophets from Moses to Christ. And the incidents of the love-ideal and love-tragedy throughout its course, which, as in all human experience, did not run smooth, but was ultimately triumphant, are admirably developed and in language so felicitous that one feels almost as if it were from the Bible-fount itself.

Love—the greatest thing in the world—found expression in ancient times just as it does today; although the setting differed, the essentials are the same, and the reader of modern fictional literature will find something refreshing in the pure and ardent affection of the hero

and heroine, in their tribulations and joys. We believe that this book will be uplifting and that it will have a healthful influence on readers of the present time; for, as has been well said, "There is no time in life when books do not influence a man," and the potency and sway of a good book are incalculable.

The love story—the leading motive of the book—illustrates the theme of the Song of Songs: that love is stronger than death. It is interesting to observe that love at first sight was, in the estimation of Mapu, as common a thing as it is in our own times, and that the course of love ran no more smoothly then than now. The manner in which the passion was manifested, especially of the heroine, may shock the sensibilities of some of the readers, because of the departure from certain conventionalities to which they are accustomed; but it is well to learn how other people express their affection and how a great Hebrew scholar imagines the passion and the practice of love among the Israelites 2,700 years ago.

Mr. Schapiro has put the reading public unfamiliar with Hebrew language and literature under a deep debt of gratitude for the excellent manner in which he has rendered into English this masterpiece of Abraham Mapu, whose fame is known to the uttermost ends of the earth as the "Father of Jewish Fiction."

The translator is an acknowledged master of Hebrew, the Rabbinical exegesis of the Old Testament, and the Talmudical interpretation of the same. He has written much and well, being the author of many useful and learned pamphlets. He is therefore eminently well qualified to translate for readers of English the wonderfully poetic and figurative language of the original, which abounds in prose-poetry and song of the highest character. Indeed, the translation is so free from the usual

ear-marks of translated works that, if there were not two names on the title-page, it might well be taken for an original work in English.

We have compared the translation here and there with the original of Mapu and find that it is a fair and sympathetic rendering. Sometimes, especially in the poetic passages, the translator varies slightly the figures of the Hebrew; but in such cases, the beauty so far from being impaired, seems often to be improved. This is high praise for a translation, but it is amply justified by such a gem as the last verse of the first song of Ammon in praise of country life, which reads:

"Crowns, wrought of gold and many a precious stone,
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press:
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone,
With which he decks the chosen Shepherdess."

בְּרֹאשֵׁי זָהָב וְעִבְרִים יְקִירֹת
תְּהַיְבֵן לְרֹאשֵׁי הַמְּלָכִים הַמְּבֻרָחִים
שֶׁלֹּטְנֵי אֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר־יִהְיֶינָה
רֹזִים עַל רֹאשׁ הַרְעוּת הַבְּחֻרִים

And by a particularly felicitous rendering of a poem that sounds like a Psalm of David, as follows:

Oh, Zion, praise the Lord of Hosts
Whose throne is set on high,
Who spreads the day-spring round thy feet,
And lights o'erhead the sky,
To cheer thee mid thy darkest woes,
While gloom envelops all thy foes,
Thy God, who rules and never sleeps,
Awaits to bless each one who weeps.

INTRODUCTION

He drops the dew upon the grass
 Throughout the silent night,
 And tints the mountain-tops with joy
 At the primal gleam of light,
 While songs of love the valleys greet
 As worshipers at Shiloh meet
 To praise him for the favor shown
 To all who worship at His throne.

Sing, sing, oh, sing unto the Lord,
 Ye mountain-tops and stars;
 Sing, sing, oh, sing, brave Zion's sons,
 For victory crowns your scars;
 Sing, sing, ye daughters of our race,
 Glad songs of praise with ancient grace,
 For all the cruel foemen fly
 Before our King who rules on high.

תקוע נופא ביום תהלה.
 יחד ירוע לאדם ערובי תהלה.
 אשור לזה יתן יצו: זהו זה אלוהיך.
 עשה עם ערומים חסד ערבות.
 לעשותו לך גרים על אבותי.
 וכל עמך אשור, ואלהו עמי בלתי.

תקועם על האשור, וזהו זה אלוהיך.
 עשיתם תקועם אשורם ערבות.
 אשורם אלוהיך זהו זה אלוהיך.
 וזהו זה אלוהיך ערבות ערבות.
 ואלהו עמי בלתי.

הוא אלוהיך וזהו זה אלוהיך.
 וזהו זה אלוהיך ערבות ערבות.
 וזהו זה אלוהיך ערבות ערבות.
 וזהו זה אלוהיך ערבות ערבות.
 וזהו זה אלוהיך ערבות ערבות.

Within the limits of a Foreword it is impossible adequately to do justice to the scholarship and intrinsic worth of such a work as this; but, without flattery, it can safely be asserted that Mr. Schapiro has presented in a singularly fascinating way in its English dress, the greatest novel that has ever been produced in the Hebrew language. To say more would be like painting the lily or refining pure gold.

TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

The Why and How of the Issuance of

The Shepherd-Prince



HE position of a translator—especially of an original work that has achieved distinction and popularity in its own idiom—is somewhat anomalous; for, however accurate and redolent of the spirit of the work translated he may have made it, the blame for anything that does not suit or please the reader's taste has to be borne by him who provides the vehicle through which those of other tongues may apprehend the original setting. It is always, therefore, a source of satisfaction to a translator to be assured by men competent to judge that he has succeeded in carrying out the aims and ideals which possessed him when undertaking the rendering of a work from one language into another.

The aims I set before me in this translation—a labor extending over years and representing many revisions and considerable research, constant and profound, into Hebrew and Rabbinical literature and tradition—were to present in an English garb, so that it could be apprehended and enjoyed by English-speaking peoples, this masterpiece and unique work by the Founder of Jewish Fiction—Abraham Mapu. As a corollary to this, I felt that if my effort succeeded, the reading public would have a much clearer and better insight into Jewish history, habits, and customs in the days before the First Captivity. A further thought

was in my mind that it would be a means of removing much of that misappreciation and prejudice which Jews have had to suffer at the hands of Christians, by removing misunderstandings and falsities and by presenting in story form the thoughts, emotions, ideals, and characteristics of the Hebrew race, all through its varied and eventful history.

I saw a vision, felt a message that I must convey, and was moved to do so in my own way, because thereby I could carry out my ambition to produce a book which, not alone in its text but in the beauty of its illustrations, its typography and its general physical "get-up," should set a high-water mark and become the most ornate and superb volume of Hebrew historic fiction ever issued from the press.

I therefore refused the adventitious advantages offered by historic publishing houses, and decided, although it was a supremely difficult task, involving many self-denials on my part, to issue the book myself under my own supervision and imprimatur, aided by the kindly and spontaneous co-operation of friends who heartened and encouraged me in this laudable and novel adventure in publication.

To them and to those over thirty eminent divines especially, who after reading in proof-form the text gave me their opinions in such generous a manner as will be seen in the "Appreciations" that appeared in separate brochures, I wish to extend my heartfelt gratitude. It would ill become me to say how far I have succeeded in carrying out my original aims; rather will I let others express their judgment.

I might have done better had I had a life-long acquaintance with the beautiful English language—the tongue of Shakespeare and of Lincoln—but my excuse

must be that only in my early manhood did I come under the aegis of the American Flag. And here I give the reader a bit of personal history—a "human document," so to speak—by telling him that when I landed on these hospitable shores—the land of liberty and ideals, the lodestar of human hopes and aspirations—I knew not a word of that sonorous and expressive language which in richness of diction and capabilities of thought-expression is a great and priceless heritage because it has received affluents from the rivers of speech of ancient and modern times, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Oriental, and sporadic vocabularies, source-founts of human utterance.

I may, however, without false modesty, express the hope that in "THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE" there is a story for the reader which will give him healthy views of life as it is portrayed by the heart-feelings and experiences of the characters that move upon the stage of action, and likewise give a clearer and more attractive view of life during a period of great historical interest that foreshadowed the dawn of a new era in the world's progress.

In a word, I trust the book will have a good and a lasting influence, not merely a pleasurable and transient one, but that it may be the means of promoting a more charitable and clearer understanding and sympathy between Jew and Gentile, sons of the one true God, Who was the God of Israel in the days covered by this story as He is today both of Jew and Gentile, bond and free, all being His sons and His beloved.

If the reading of the "Shepherd-Prince" will show the Gentile reader that the Jewish people, like other great and ancient races, must not be judged by those who may have disgraced them but by those who represent in their daily life avocation and conduct, a people of

high ideals and feelings; then I shall have fulfilled one of my most cherished ambitions. If, too, the book shall lead my own people to a greater and more constant study of the Law and the Prophets—the Old Testament, which is today too often neglected by them—and to prize more highly God's gift to His Chosen People in making them in olden times the custodian of His revelation to many through the inspired writers of that wondrous Book, I shall indeed feel that my labor has not been in vain.

This book deals with the times known as the "Golden Period" in Jewish history; for it was the age of the divine-intoxicated seers, Isaiah and of Nahum and Micah. The period was one of intense struggle between Paganism and the true worship of Jehovah, each contending for supremacy—the one represented by Sennacherib and the enemies of Israel, and the other by Hezekiah and Isaiah.

The good characters in Mapu's masterpiece present pictures—spiritual, chaste, and inspiring. The love between hero and heroine is of purest and most ennobling type, free from passion and material gloss.

What a horror had Mapu of hypocrisy, vulgarity, and lowness of thought; and to think that this book was written by a Russian Jew within the pale. No wonder why the Lord used our race as His Chosen People for the bearing of a message of blessing for all humanity.

Homer and Virgil wrote for Greeks and Romans, but David sang for all nations and all times.

It is worthy of notice that Mapu was one of the people who were forbidden to till the soil by the Czarist's government and yet could write so feelingly and eloquently of the beauty of pastoral life, as witness the dissertation in Chapter VII.

Then, too, he shows that charity in the days of

which he writes was a real, personal, and whole-hearted thing, not a mere side issue to be taken up when convenient and laid by until another incitement arises.

Mapu presents life in a natural, intensely human, and altruistically sympathetic manner which appeals to all humanity. This work has been translated, indeed, into most civilized tongues, the latest being the Arabic!

Mapu, after neglect and abuse, is recognized today as one of the super-intellectuals who has made history vital and touched the life of the present generation by a mirrored analysis and portraiture of human life and action twenty-eight centuries ago.

The work now translated into English appeared nearly seventy years since and yet the characters live as real as if it had been issued today, and the interesting fact is that this book aroused an intense love for Zion and really pioneered what is now known as Zionism.

In giving this work in English to the public I wish to add a tribute to the memory of a good and loyal friend, the Rev. M. E. Dwight, D.D., who has passed on but not gone away, for his influence has been a great contributory factor in all those things which are, after all, the only ones worth while in life, or, to put it in the words of the great Hebrew-Christian apostle: "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."

From Dr. Dwight I received much help and encouragement, especially in the collating of the poetic renderings in "The Shepherd-Prince."

Much thanks is also due to my beloved friend and brother, the Rev. Kenneth Mackenzie, the Rev.

xx TRANSLATOR'S FOREWORD

H. E. Woolever, D.D., and George H. Sandison, Ph.D., who kindly read in proof form the pages of "The Shepherd-Prince" before publication.

And so, whatever its imperfections and blemishes may be, I put forth this effort, the fruit of many years' toil, sometimes of tears and tribulations, leaving it to you, Gentle Reader, to give it a friendly and courteous welcome, if it appeal, as I hope and believe it will, to your heart and head.

B. A. M. Schapiro

Bible House, New York.



THE SHEPHERD-PRINCE

CHAPTER I

THE COVENANT

IN the reign of King Ahaz, there lived at Jerusalem a man named Joram-ben-Abiezer. He was a nobleman of Judah, and captain over a thousand armed men. He owned many fields and vineyards on Mt. Carmel and at Sharon, and had herds of sheep and cattle in Bethlehem Judea. He also possessed many elegant palaces, adorned with ivory carvings, and was rich in gold and silver.

Joram had two wives, Hagith and Naomi. Naomi was beautiful in person, gracious in word and in deeds. On this account Joram loved her dearly, but she was childless.

When Hagith saw that her companion had found favor in Joram's eyes she became envious and sought to vex Naomi.

"What," said she, "shall that dry twig on Joram's stem exalt itself above the fruitful one?" Then she gazed proudly at her two children.

Perceiving Hagith's behavior, Joram built a separate house for Naomi, that she might escape the envy and derision of her rival.

He had appointed his servant, Achan, steward over his entire household. He had also given him Helah, a Canaanitish woman, Hagith's maid-servant, for his wife.

Joram possessed a faithful friend, who loved him as a brother. He had descended from the kings of Judah—and was King Ahaz's treasurer. He was rich and attractive, highly esteemed by all who knew him. He inclined his ear to the words of the prophets, and because he loved their teachings, gave freely to their support, and used his influence for their protection. He was called Jedidjah, "the Benefactor."

Joram and Jedidjah shone like two precious stones in a crown, during the reign of Ahaz—that perverse generation. Their hearts remained faithful to God, and his saints, and they associated with the prophets, who adhered to the teachings of Isaiah, the son of Amos.

At the same time, Judge Mattan, the son of Jozabad, "the Tyrant," lived at Jerusalem. He was a man of violence, yet he associated with Joram, and became his most intimate friend and counsellor. Mattan publicly manifested great affection for Joram, but in his heart he had hated him ever since Hagith had become the latter's wife. Joram was unsuspecting and never dreamt of Mattan's deceitfulness, but considered him a sincere friend.

Mattan's enmity arose from the following occurrence: Jozabad had been a crafty villain, striving to rob his fellow-inhabitants of their property. He had amassed his riches through injustice and violence. In vain did the injured complain; he would restore nothing on which he had once laid his hands; with him, not justice, but brute force decided the matter. There were many who supported him, on account of his great

wealth, or through fear, and thus he ever succeeded in triumphing over his opponents, when their case came before the judges at the gate. Among many others who were thus at strife with Jozabad was Ira, Hagith's father, on account of Jozabad having changed the boundaries of his fruitful field, adjoining the latter's land, in the darkness of night. This strife lasted many years, and the two men bitterly hated each other.

Jozabad was already a decrepit old man, when Mattan, the robber's son, fell violently in love with Hagith, and his love for Ira's daughter exceeded the father's hatred. He sought her, and said:

"Oh! that the days of mourning for my father might come speedily. I would then restore to thy father the disputed tract of land, together with the surrounding acres, as a compensation for the long-existing strife. This I would do, because I love thee, Hagith, above all others. Therefore, bestow upon me the affection of thy youth, and become my wife. See, I am my father's only heir, and, with my riches, thou shalt lack for naught."

Hagith had, however, given her heart to nobleman Joram, yet she did not leave Mattan without hope. Ira, her father, had advised this course, although he had promised his daughter to Joram.

Jozabad, greatly to the delight of his son Mattan and the people whom he had robbed, died in the course of time. Those whom he had defrauded appealed to Mattan to restore to them the possessions which his father had taken from

them, but his heart was like the heart of his father.

After the applicants had departed, Mattan went to Ira, and said:

"Behold! my father, who was thine opponent is dead, therefore take back thy field. I will also give thee the surrounding acres, to recompense thee for the many years during which my father reaped the products of the ground, besides you may charge me with the taxes, and I will increase the dowry and the gifts; only give me thy daughter, Hagith, as my wife, for I love her."

Then Ira answered him:

"Thy father robbed the poor, and trod the needy under foot, therefore a curse will rest upon thee. Moreover, how can I give my daughter to one whom so many reproach? However, if thou dost wish to form an alliance with me, hearken to my words, and I will be thy father. Go forth, call together those whom thy father robbed, make restitution for that which he took away; then the complaints of the people against thee will cease."

"Truly, thou desirest a high price for thy daughter, but I will esteem it a light matter if therewith I can secure her affections," was Mattan's response.

"Go forth, then," said Ira, "and do as I have told thee, and I will give thee Hagith, my daughter, when thy days of mourning are ended."

Mattan went from thence with a light heart, and tarried not in doing as Ira had demanded. After the going down of the sun, he called to-

gether all those whom his father had defrauded, and before faithful witnesses, thus addressed them:

"You were averse to my father, and contented vainly against him for many long years. You have also sought to confer with me, but I have closed my ears against you, for who of you dare venture to step forth against me in the gates? I am a strong and mighty man, and woe to him who ventures to attack me. But know ye, this day, that not by force, nor by the strength of your hands, but only through the righteousness of my heart do I guarantee to restore to you this moment that which for long years you have unsuccessfully striven to obtain, for I fear the Lord, whose servant I am."

When Mattan had thus spoken, the poor and oppressed rejoiced, and blessed him. That evening he gave them a great feast, and after they had eaten and drank, went exultingly away. All who heard of Mattan's goodness were astonished. The people proclaimed his righteousness in the gates; the city resounded with his praise, and he was made a judge.

When the days of mourning were ended and Mattan demanded from Ira his daughter, whom he had promised him, he had to endure a grievous disappointment, for Hagith was not to be found in her father's house. Ira said to him:

"I must approach thee, bowed down with shame, for my daughter, without my consent and knowledge, has become the wife of Joram, the nobleman."

Then Mattan perceived that he had been de-

ceived by Ira and Hagith. He also saw that he could not recall the pledges he had made; therefore, he concealed his anger and hatred with smooth words.

"Do not vex thyself, my dear friend," he said to Ira. "The Lord has allotted thy daughter to Joram. We must submit to his will. I do not repent of my good deeds. I will walk further on in the way of godliness, and will never more lay aside the robe of righteousness in which I have clothed myself. God grant that thy daughter may find peace in the house of Joram, her husband; my heart will rejoice to know of her happiness."

When Ira heard these words, he was delighted with Mattan's apparently sincere intentions. He grasped him by the hand, and spoke with great feeling:

"All just persons will praise thee, and be astonished at thy righteousness; therefore, to fill up the measure of thy favor, come with me to Joram, and tell him and my daughter that thou dost forgive them, though they have not treated thee as thy virtue and purity of heart deserve. For on account of this matter their joy hitherto has not been full."

"Let us go," said Mattan quietly.

They went to Joram, and Ira told of Mattan's magnanimity. Joram said to Mattan:

"Behold! I see thy face as the face of God; be thou henceforth my faithful friend. I will return thy love."

From that time Mattan associated as a friend with Joram, but in the depths of his heart he

hated him, and resolved to ruin him if ever he found opportunity.

* * *

Hananel, one of Ephraim's nobles, dwelt in Samaria. He was accustomed to go up to Jerusalem to attend the Feasts, and to present himself before the Lord. Once when he went up to celebrate the Feast of the Tabernacles, as was his custom, he took with him his seventeen-year-old daughter, Thirza. She was very amiable and beautiful. When she entered the city, the sons of the princes were struck with her beauty. Jedidjah also looked upon her, and longed for her favor. In order to become acquainted with her, he prepared a feast to which he invited Hananel, with his beautiful daughter, his friend Joram, and his two wives, the sons of the prophets, and other pious men among his friends. When they had taken wine, and their hearts were merry, Jedidjah said to Hananel:

"Look around thee! All that is beautiful and precious that the eye can behold is in Jerusalem. Let thy daughter be as one of its jewels. Oh! that she might ever bloom as a rose therein!"

"She will certainly bloom," answered Hananel, "when I plant her in a cheerful garden, where she shall drink of heaven's dew."

"Oh! that I might prepare such a garden for thy daughter!" exclaimed Jedidjah, "my love would be as the dew of heaven, and all the goods and possessions with which God has so richly

blessed me would be the fertile soil in which she should grow and thrive."

Hananel then said:

"For more than a year many illustrious sons of Ephraim have knocked at my door and sought to obtain my child, but she has proudly disdained them and their riches, and turned to me with these words: 'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone. My soul's desire is for a man of Judea, an inhabitant of Jerusalem.' So I have brought her hither to give her to the man of her choice. Speak, therefore, with the maiden, and if thou dost find favor in her sight, I will bless thy union in the name of Jehovah."

So Jedidjah went to Thirza and asked:

"Noble maiden, how doth Zion please thee, and what dost thou think of her inhabitants?"

"Zion lies before me as the Garden of Eden, and her inhabitants walk herein, as the angels of the Lord," was Thirza's response.

"Thou makest me proud with thy words, for I am an inhabitant of Jerusalem," said Jedidjah.

The maiden replied:

"Truly all its inhabitants may be proud, and hold their heads high, if they resemble thee."

"My only wish," was Jedidjah's response, "is that my life may speak loudly for me; with her whom I love, I shall be contented when my conduct, and that which I possess, shall awaken an echo in the soul of her who is dearer to me than all others."

"The Lord bless her who is so dear to thee!" exclaimed Thirza.

Jedidjah seizing her hand, cried:

"The Lord bless thee, thou noble one, and make thee a blessing to me."

The maiden bowed low and said graciously: "Be thou, thyself, my mouth-piece to my father, his reply will agree with the wish of my heart."

While they were conversing, Hananel entered and said to his daughter, in assent to her last words:

"Dearest, if thou wouldst know my mind, I say to thee that the man who stands before thee, appears to me the fairest of ten thousand."

Then Jedidjah laughed.

"Thy daughter does not see me as thou dost," he said, "for I appear to her as an angel of the Lord."

Hananel interrupted him:

"Therefore, I am come as a messenger of the Lord to bless your union in the name of Jehovah, who dwells in Zion."

"Then I am thine," cried Thirza, "yet consider my words; I have chosen thee as one from among many, therefore, I will be thy one and only wife."

"Thou art mine only one. Thou shalt remain mine only one, and none other shall come between us."

With these words, Jedidjah embraced Thirza, and openly declared her his betrothed. Thereupon he distributed rich presents with a lavish hand among the sons of the prophets. A few days after Thirza became his wife, Hananel re-

mained with his son-in-law and was never weary of beholding his daughter's happiness, for Jedidjah loved her as the apple of his eye.

Toward the end of Hananel's sojourn in Zion, the Philistines began to multiply their invasions upon the Lowlands and south of Judea, and to capture cities and villages. Joram, who was one of the captains of the army, prepared to go against the enemy. Just at this period, a third son was born to Hagith, his wife. Joram named him Azrikam, for he said, "The Lord will deliver us from our enemies!"

Helah also had a son, whom she named Nabal. Hagith chose Helah for Azrikam's nurse, and Helah had to give her own child into the care of one of the slaves. Now Achan was sorely vexed at having to give his child into a stranger's hands.

One day, Joram invited Jedidjah to his summer home which was on the Mount of Olives. and who knows whether I shall return in safety?" said Joram to his friend. "For that reason let us make a covenant, which shall include our children also. If I fall in battle or am taken captive, be thou a father to my household and watch over my children. Appoint whomsoever thou wilt upon my estates and thou mayest remove, at thy pleasure, those who already hold positions, save Sithri, one of the sons of the prophets in Carmel, and his aged brother, Abisai, because they are God-fearing men, and kinsmen of Naomi, my wife. The Lord may bless through thy wife, Thirza, and my wife Naomi. Should ever the

one have a son, and the other a daughter, in due time they might be united. As I love thee, so Naomi, my wife, loves thy Thirza. How great then will be the love of our children! The fruit from Carmel thou shalt devote to providing for the sons of the prophets. A table shall be spread at every feast for four hundred poor people, widows and orphans, as has always been the custom of my house. The summer house is thine. I give it to thee."

"The most costly jewel cannot be compared in value to the love of a faithful friend," was Jedidjah's quick response. "Take, therefore, my seal-ring, place it upon thy right hand. May it be to thee evermore a token of true love. Go in peace, may the Lord go with thee! If God shall one day bring thee safely back we will sacrifice the thank offerings and rejoice with our families, in this very summer house."

When Jedidjah ceased speaking, the two friends kissed each other and separated.

When next the morning-star arose, Joram gathered his household together. He blessed them all, kissed his two wives, tore himself with tears from the arms of his beloved Naomi and departed with the host.

Soon after these events, Thirza had a daughter whom Jedidjah named Thamar. Hananel ordered a ring to be made, on which his name and Thamar's were engraved in fine characters. He gave this to Thirza.

"This ring," he said, "shall be a pledge to thee that Thamar is to have an equal portion

among my sons; when she is older, she is to wear it."

Hananel tarried another month at Zion, then he blessed his children, and returned to Samaria. A messenger soon after appeared with the news that Joram had been captured by the Philistines. There was great mourning in Jedidjah's house. Naomi wept incessantly, but Hagith rejoiced at seeing her companion's intense grief, and comforted herself over her husband's captivity, with these words: "Now Naomi will not exalt herself over me, for I will be the mistress of the house." This she said insolently, and she carried herself accordingly, exercising severe rule over all the servants, and punishing the slightest fault with cruelty and harshness. Naomi paid no attention to this because her whole soul overflowed with grief for her husband.

Achan stifled his rage, when he saw how heavily Hagith's hand rested upon Helah and how she was tormented and beaten like a base-born slave, but he formed many schemes for freeing his wife and himself from their oppression.



CHAPTER II

THE UNRIGHTEOUS JUDGE

JUDGE MATTAN heard what had taken place in Joram's house. He was still further displeased because Joram had shown less confidence in him than in Jedidjah, whom also he had for a long time hated. He had hoped that in the event of Joram's departure, the overseeing of his affairs would have been transferred to him. However, he was greatly delighted at hearing the tidings of Joram's captivity and thought, "Now, at last the long expected day on which I can put in the sickle and destroy this detested house, has dawned." He therefore hastened to Joram's dwelling and comforted Naomi and Hagith with consoling words in which his heart had no part. He saw with pleasure that Hagith must spend her youth in mourning as a widow, while her husband was still living.

One day he approached Hagith's apartment just as she was cruelly beating her maid, Helah. When she perceived him she desisted and said:

"I have appointed my maid as nurse for my son, Azrikam, yet I can hardly be absent for a moment without her running over to the slave-woman's house to quiet her child, Nabal, the scare-crow."

Achan beheld this scene. He was mortified because his wife had endured such shameful treatment, even in his presence, and moreover before a stranger. He began to weep, and, turning to Mattan, he complained:

"Master, judge thou my wife's offense. I found my child alone and helpless in his cradle. He cried loudly, but none of the slave-women troubled themselves about him. I called his mother hither to quiet the child. If I have done wrong, my mistress should punish me, not my wife."

Then Hagith began to abuse Achan:

"Oh! thou good-for-nothing menial! Who bade thee to remain in my house? Why didst thou not go hence at the seventh year, when thou hadst thy choice to go or stay? Didst thou not allow thine ear to be bored, as a sign that thou didst refuse freedom and choose slavery? Did not my husband, before going to battle, ask thee if thou wished thy freedom and didst thou not reply, 'Leave me in thy house, for here are my wife and my children'? Therefore be silent or else my hand will rest heavily upon thee, too."

Mattan saw and heard how disorderly matters stood in Joram's house, yet remained silent. As he went away he muttered:

"Achan is but a faintly burning log, yet I will soon stir up his wrath and he will become a flaming fire, a burning torch with which in due season I will revenge myself on Hagith for all the evil she has done me."

One evening, soon after, Achan sought Judge Mattan and said to him:

"Sir, thou hast seen the wrong which I endure; therefore, consider the matter and counsel me how to free myself from this wicked woman. Verily, the slave's life is already hard enough, yet should he unjustly be doomed to destruction?"

"Thine anger burns like fire," said Mattan, "and it might lighten thy heart if with the flame of thy wrath thou shouldst set all Joram's palaces on fire and burn them and their inhabitants to ashes."

Achan's eyes sparkled with unholy desire and he breathlessly asked:

"Sir, art thou in earnest, or dost thou mock thy servant?"

Mattan answered:

"What would it profit me to mock one already overwhelmed with shame and grief?"

Achan now perceived what Mattan desired.

"Should Naomi, who has been a good mistress to me, suffer on account of Hagith's hardness?" he asked.

Mattan saw that he had brought Achan to the desired point. He arose and said:

"Listen to my counsel. Burn Hagith's palace and her servants' houses. First, bring thy little son to thy wife, but give Azrikam to the slave-women, that he may be destroyed with the others. Each of the children is one month old. No one will notice the exchange. Even Jedidjah and Thirza will have no suspicion, for they are unfriendly to the detested Hagith and have scarcely seen her child. Thou shalt spare Naomi's house, that thy crime may rest upon her, and that it may

be said, "The jealousy of Naomi has devoured the dwellings of Joram." I will take care that Naomi shall depart, never to return. Then none of thy master's house shall be left. Thy son Nabal shall be called Azrikam and shall be the sole heir of Joram's treasures, his fields and vineyards, his herds and wine presses. This shall be thy harvest, but the gleanings shall belong to me. Before thou hast kindled the fire, remove all the valuables from Joram's treasure chambers. I will send to your assistance Chepher and Bukjah, two crafty, artful men, but considered by the whole city to be honorable persons. They will bring the treasure to me. Here is a key to the treasure house. When I was Joram's friend I had it made. I do this, because Joram tore from me what I dearly valued. He craftily robbed me of Hagith, for whom I vainly gave up all my father's wealth. His treasure shall now serve as a recompense for all my losses."

Achan's heart beat loudly. Over and over again he exclaimed:

"Satan himself could not have contrived a better plot!"

Mattan warned him to be cautious and told him to come again. Achan followed Mattan's directions, and made all arrangements for carrying out his purpose, but kept his intention of exchanging the children from Chepher and Bukjah.

One dark and dismal night, when the clouds swept over the sky and the wind rushed over the earth and the household was sleeping soundly, Achan emptied his master's treasure chambers.

Chepher and Bukjah stood ready to carry everything to Mattan, who hid all the treasure in his private cave. After that Achan ascended to the roof of the houses which he wished to burn and scattered sulphur upon them. He then went to the slave's wing, took away his child and barred the door on the outside. Helah did likewise in Hagith's apartments. When this was done, Achan fired the buildings at each of the four corners. Immediately the flames shot up everywhere, while a frightful pillar of smoke rose to the sky.

Achan waited till the fire had gained control, then he ran to Naomi's house, where, it being some distance away, all were sleeping peacefully. He held his hands above his head and shrieked:

"Wake up, my mistress. A terrible fire is consuming Joram's dwelling and there is no one there to extinguish it. My wife jumped out of the window with Hagith's little one. Hagith sought to save both of her other children, but the flames had already seized them. All are burned. Oh! Woe! Nabal my son is also there, for he had been in the slavehouse."

While he thus mourned before Naomi, Chepher and Bukjah passed under the windows and one said to the other, in a loud voice:

"See, Naomi's jealousy has hitherto burned in secret, but to-day it has burst into a bright flame and destroyed Joram's dwellings."

Naomi trembled when she heard these words, and she cried:

"A shameful plot has been arranged and all the guilt will fall upon me. Oh, woe is me! Where shall I flee, where shall I hide myself?"

"Disguise thyself, my mistress, in men's clothing and escape until the storm is over," said Achan, "for I fear the friends of Hagith will force an entrance and require her blood at thy hands."

Naomi followed Achan's advice, and sprang out of the window to save her life. Achan said to the two maids:

"Leave this place and come with me, and I will take you where you may be safe till this turmoil is over."

He led them to the treasure chamber, barred the door and fired that also. The unfortunate sacrifices screamed in agony, but the smoke and flames stifled their cries and they were consumed.

"There is no one remaining of the house of Joram," said Achan to his wife. "Therefore, our deed can not be betrayed. So embrace Nabal, kiss him, and henceforth call him Azrikam."

Gradually the neighbors, whom the alarm of fire had awakened, gathered together around the scene of the disaster. Achan and Helah changed their demeanor and began to mourn and lament. Jedidjah and Thirza came without delay. When they saw the destruction, they wrung their hands, crying:

"Woe! Woe!"

They hastened quickly to Naomi's house, but found it deserted. Then they returned to Achan and Helah, asking:

"Where is Naomi?"

"Alas!" Achan cried: "what a misfortune the Almighty has sent upon us! Listen to what I know of the matter. I hastened this morning to my work in the field. On my return, as I came near our house there was an awful smell, like burning sulphur. I saw that in delay was danger and ran as quickly as I could to save my mistress, Hagith and her children. I arrived there just as Hagith handed Azrikam out of the window to my wife. Hagith ran back to rescue the other two children, but the flames laid hold of them and they were all burned. Since there were no more to be helped I hastened to Naomi, but could not find her. Now, for the first time, I thought of our own child, and flew to the slaves' wing to save him if there was yet time. Woe to me! I came too late!"

Helah also wept, lamented and said:

"Unmerciful as hell was the jealousy between Joram's two wives! Now my Nabal has also become a victim of the flames! Woe!" And Achan cried again: "How Hagith did abuse the mild Naomi! She upbraided her with cruel words and wicked remarks. 'Be thou no longer proud of Joram's love,' she cried after her, 'for Joram is dead and my sons will inherit his wealth. They will become great and drive thee away and thou wilt have no portion of the inheritance, because thou art a stranger in these houses.'"

Jedidjah and Thirza trembled at all they had seen and heard. Immediately Hagith's kinsfolk came, seeking revenge. They were in a rage and cried:

"Where is Naomi, the murderess?"
 "Bring Azrikam to my house," Jedidjah said to Helah. "Abide there and be his nurse as hitherto, so that this spark on Joram's stem be not extinguished."

Meanwhile the relatives and friends of Hagith ceased not crying:

"Where is Naomi, the serpent, the blood-thirsty hyena? Oh! that she were here, that with her blood we might quench the fire which her hands kindled!"

Jedidjah sought as far as possible to quiet them.

"Time will reveal her hiding-place," he said.

Now, Naomi had sought shelter with Abisai, her kinsman, the overseer of her husband's flocks in Bethlehem, but Abisai sent her to his brother Sithri, who offered her a hiding-place in a remote valley near Mt. Carmel. Twelve days later, the unfortunate woman gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. She named the boy Amnon and the girl Penina. After this, Sithri went to Jerusalem to confer with Jedidjah concerning Joram's possessions. When he entered the gate, he heard Chepher and Bukjah testifying before the elders:

"When we returned recently from the land of the Philistines, we met Naomi, Joram's wife, on the road which leads to Ekron. She was in a wagon drawn by a team of mules, seated by the side of a young man. After the teams came camels, laden with all sorts of goods, with two maid-servants mounted on them. We asked Naomi where she was going with all those goods. She answered, that she was traveling to the

princes of the Philistines to purchase her husband's freedom and that the man who sat beside her was Joram's messenger. We said, 'God grant thee thy heart's desire and bless thy undertaking. Mayest thou safely return with thy husband Joram to the land of his birth!' When we came to Jerusalem, we could not believe our ears when we heard of the horrible calamities which had overtaken Joram's house. Therefore we have come before the elders to testify what we have seen with our eyes and heard with our ears."

When the elders and judges heard these words they with one voice exclaimed:

"Now all appears plain to us, and we can no longer doubt Naomi's guilt."

Judge Mattan rose up and said:

"Let this crime be written in the judge's book of remembrance, and thus the sin of Naomi will be ever before the elders in the gate."

When Mattan had informed Jedidjah of the judicial proceedings, the latter exclaimed:

"It is clear as the sun at noonday that jealousy alone has destroyed many souls in Joram's house. Yes, crime, shame and misfortune have come upon the house of my best friend. Naomi, whom he loved above all others, has become faithless to him, for scarcely was he in the power of his enemies before she set fire to his house and suffered Hagith, whom she detested, and her children to be consumed. Even then, the measure of her evil deeds was not full, for she left her dwelling secretly and fled with her lover."

"Verily, it is so," Thirza added. "Therefore it is better to take but one wife and to bestow love

on her alone. This have we done, and so will we decide for Thamar, our daughter, when the time will come for her to be spoken for.”

Jedidjah said again:

“If Naomi committed such an awful crime, she could not have loved Joram faithfully and sincerely, therefore her children can not be treated as Joram’s heirs. Azrikam remains, the only scion on Joram’s stem. Our Thamar is already espoused to him, according to the covenant which I made with his father, but she shall be his only wife.”

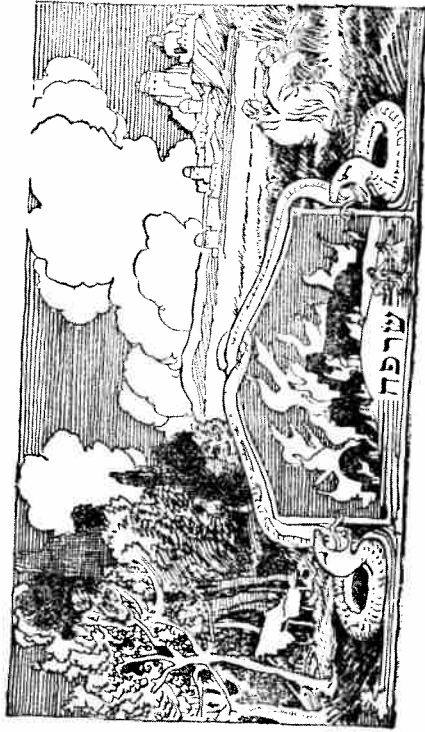
Thus spoke Jedidjah of the false Azrikam, and cast a pitiful glance upon this last member of Joram’s house.

Toward the close of the year, Thirza bore a son, and they named him Theman. The three children grew up together in Jedidjah’s house. Theman and Thamar bloomed like two lovely flowers, but Azrikam grew like a thorn bush. His heart was corrupt from his youth and there was no comeliness about him. Jedidjah, however, looked not on his outward appearance, because of the covenant, which he had made with his father.

Sithri, while in Jerusalem, had seen that wicked people heaped reproach upon Naomi’s name, that false witnesses swore against her, that there was no one to contradict their evidence, and therefore he carefully hid his mistress and her children in the fastnesses of Carmel, and his wife brought them provisions. When the children were old enough, she weaned them. Then Sithri sent Amnon to his brother Abisai, who gave him to one of his old shepherds to bring up. The

shepherd was to say he had bought the boy of an unknown man, who had found him abandoned in a field. Amnon so grew up among the shepherds. He was beautiful in person, still no one cared greatly for him. Abisai alone treated him with affection and when the old shepherd in whose care he had been placed died, he gave him a place among his boys, who tended Joram’s sheep. So Amnon passed among his companions as a bondman.

Six years after the fire, Naomi ventured to come forth from her hiding-place. Sithri gave her a hut in a deep valley. It was surrounded by cypress trees. Here she dwelt with her daughter and an old woman. She went gleaning in Joram’s fields, with the other poor women of the neighborhood, and called herself a Philistine woman. She told the people she had married a man of Judea and that he was dead.



out an idol which he had brought with him, and threw it on the ground.

"Lie there in thy weakness, thou piece of carved wood! Thou art useless in the land of Judea. I have served thee as priest for ten long years. I have borne thee, and lifted thee up before the eyes of thy servants. I have taught them thy fear. Thou wast my god, and I was thy mouth-piece. With the other priests I murdered and robbed on the way to Shechem, and thy permission shielded me. I drank thy wine, which was presented to thee and ate the flesh of the sacrifices slain for thee. Thou hast also provided me with clothing. I have seen pleasant days with thee and merry was the first period of my priesthood. Alas, all this is now at an end! Thy temples are destroyed, the enemy has driven the calves from Beth-Aven. Whither shall I go with thee? Shall I bring thee to Zion? No, because thou couldst not withstand the mighty God who reigns therein. Thou wouldst be in my way. So then, lie there, naked and destitute, for behold, I take away thy silver cover and thy gold ornament. They cannot help thee, but they will repay me for my long service and all my labor for thee."

The fugitive who thus spoke was Zimri, a priest of Baal. He had hitherto belonged to those abandoned men who lay in wait along the roads and lanes to hinder the children of Israel from going up to worship God on His holy hill. Lately, with many of his fellow-inhabitants, he had been in prison, whence, as he was very light-footed, he had hoped to escape. While there he made the acquaintance of Hananel, the Samaritan noble-

CHAPTER III

THE PRIEST OF BAAL

HE measure of Ephraim's sin was full, and the land became ripe for God's anger and punishment in the fourth year of King Hezekiah's reign. Then the Lord laid his correcting hand on Israel. He permitted the Assyrian king with his forces to overrun the land. This king carried away the calves from Beth-Aven and the idols from Dan. He took the captured idolators during his invasion on his march to Halah and Habor, situated on the river Gozan and to the cities of Media.

Judah beheld the punishment, which the Lord permitted Israel to suffer and perceived how the Almighty's hand fell heavily upon the degenerate kingdom; therefore, he strengthened himself in the Lord and repented. The children of Judah increased their forces and remained faithful to God, walking in His ways. They gladly hearkened to David's son, their king Hezekiah, and to Isaiah, son of Amos, who were friends of God. Therefore, Judah had peace and freedom, while Ephraim was in deep affliction.

An Ephraimite fugitive, who had escaped from the Assyrians, fled at this time to Jerusalem. He halted on his way before entering Zion, took

man, and had besought him to tell him the name of his son-in-law in Jerusalem. Hananel willingly consented and gave him a sealed letter, and a seal, with the order to carry them to Jerusalem, to Jedidjah, when he should escape. Not long after they came to the river Chebar, Zimri succeeded in escaping. He had brought his idol all the way long, because he thought continually, "Perhaps I shall light upon some worshippers on the way, or there may be an opportunity to erect an altar to which we might draw near." Now he knew that no one in Jerusalem worshipped idols, so he stripped it of its ornaments, and then threw it away.

Zimri entered the city of God through the Ephraim gate just as the twilight was deepening. The streets were still full of life. Everywhere people were coming and going, running, walking, and riding. Light wagons jostled against richly ornamented chariots, filled with nobles and rich people, and the hum and roar of traffic resounded from every direction. Zimri, who had taken part in the three years' siege of Samaria and had beheld all the poverty and distress which the city had endured at the hands of the kings of Assyria and their armies, was astonished at this spectacle of peaceful activity which presented itself before his eyes. He exclaimed:

"How base is Samaria and how splendid is Zion! The streets of Samaria resound with woe-ful cries. Jerusalem reechoes with the bustle of peaceful labor. The land of Ephraim is trodden under the foot and spoiled, Judea shines with ornaments and excellence. Behold I find here a

new heaven and a new earth, a land whose inhabitants dwell in peace. The sun shines brightly upon them, and blessings stream from every star. The king exalts justice and righteousness and walks in the ways of the Lord, therefore the whole country prospers. Verily, virtue and righteousness are ever a strong defense, but only for the rich, because they protect his wealth, so that no strange hand can grasp it. They are like thorns for a poor man, like me, for my prop has been broken, my bread taken from me, and my fountain of water choked, since the time when Hezekiah destroyed the images of Baal. Could he also destroy Baal's commandments? No! for Baal's law is deceit and malice and his service is fraud, robbery, violence and murder. No king is able to put these away from the hearts of all his subjects. Well, Zimri! begin anew and seek for impostors and defrauders in Jerusalem. Thou wilt surely discover such, for the larger the city the more numerous the knaves. Are there not multitudes of rich and illustrious people here? Is envy to be absent? Where envy unites itself with craftiness, and energy joins hands with cunning, there the hand of Baal manifests itself. What need have we of altars for our idols, when we can sacrifice to them wherever we are, with heart, mouth and hands? The time will come when the poor man shall rouse himself from his hard bed, shake the straw from his head, and seat himself beside the rich and mighty. Virtue and righteousness dwell in the gates of Zion, therefore I also will gird myself about with honesty and fill my mouth with pious words, while I hide

my wickedness in the secret recesses of my heart. I will bow my head as a bulrush. My lips shall overflow with zealous, upright, God-fearing speech. Many wise people have established themselves firmly on such a foundation, and thereby thou, too, wilt be blessed: for who is so blind as a true servant of God? Who is so deaf as a pious, sincere man? A pious man is but a poor judge of human nature. He can not see into the heart of his neighbor and judge him by his words and deeds, because, to the pure in heart all things are pure. If, now, I so conduct my business that it appears honest outwardly, who shall examine my heart? Well! Craftiness shall borrow a garment from her opposite, Truth."

Zimri made no delay in carrying out his purpose. The next morning he went up to the Temple of the Lord. He met there the high priest, Azariah, of the house of Zadok, and said to him:

"Oh, master, lend thine ear to the petition of thy servant. I am the son of a nobleman of Ephraim and have from my earliest youth been brought up in the fear of Baal and according to the teachings of his priests and prophets. For that reason I esteemed the words of Jehovah as mockery and the teachings of his holy prophets as infamy. Behold! my father gave me sour grapes to eat. Shall his son's teeth, therefore, be forever set on edge? Lo! my eyes have been opened, that the counsel of God rests in the words of his servants, the prophets in Judea. Ephraim has become a desert. My people have suffered terrible afflictions and have been driven from their inheritance. Samaria has suffered a distressing

siege. For three long years she has crouched under the strokes of her chastiser. Now, the silence of death hangs over her streets. Her priests and prophets were false leaders, who, by their teachings, hastened on her destruction. Therefore, they go now with drooping lips, like lepers, and are ashamed of their own wickedness. Through the grace of God, I have escaped from the enemy's power, because He saw how my soul panted after the courts of the Lord. Now I hunger after His words and thirst after His grace; I have fled to thee, thou anointed priest of the Lord. Show me the way to serve Jehovah, and how to atone before His face for the sins of my youth. I can bring neither sacrifice nor whole-offering, for I am poor, but I will consecrate my entire being to the Lord. I can offer thee neither money nor goods. I can only beseech thee, on account of thy compassion, to teach me concerning the true God."

The high priest answered:

"The Lord bids all the children of Aaron, the wise men, and the guardians of the Torah not to accept gifts from those who seek counsel and instruction from them. Our bread is given and our water is sure. We know no need, because our wants are all supplied, through tithes and free-will offerings. For this reason all our desires and endeavors are directed toward the instruction of those who with sincere hearts seek after God. Behold, 'a broken heart and a contrite spirit' are as acceptable to the Lord now as in the olden time. Therefore, visit God's Temple daily, then thou wilt find the path of life. But

now, tell me, hast thou kinsfolk in Zion, or dost thou tarry here as a guest?"

Zimri answered:

"To-day I must seek Jedidjah, the king's treasurer. I have brought him a letter from his father-in-law, Hananel, who, with others, was carried away from Samaria."

"Remain here until evening," said the priest. "Every morning and evening, when the priests offer the daily sacrifices, Jedidjah comes up to pray in this holy place, for he is a pious man. I will intercede with him for you. Perhaps he may find a place for you in his own household, for he is one of Judea's noblemen with whom one may dwell in peace."

At twilight Jedidjah came, as was his wont, to the Temple. After his prayers were ended, the high priest spoke to him of Zimri, and so praised his piety that Jedidjah at once took the Samaritan home to his own house. Zimri delivered Hananel's letter to Jedidjah, but retained the seal, for he thought that it might at some time be useful as an instrument of deceit. Jedidjah opened the letter, which he read to his wife and children.

These are the words of the letter:

"Listen, my daughter Thirza, and Jedidjah, my son-in-law. Attend to the words of your father Hananel, the prisoner. Ye have doubtless heard the cry of Ephraim and the wail of Samaria hath reached the gates of Zion. Alas! the days of wrath! Samaria is destroyed, her king, her people, are shut up in prison. When I foresaw Ephraim's downfall, I exchanged all my pos-

sessions for gold, silver and precious stones. These treasures are hidden in a secret place, which no man's eyes can find, for I thought that when the days of confusion were ended, I would go to Jerusalem with my goods and my children. I thought thus, but the Lord in his wrath hath otherwise decided. All my children died during the siege and the days of need. Afterwards the days of wrath overtook us, the walls of the city fell and the enemy slew many in the streets. I was forced to leave the graves of my children and all my treasures, and at the head of a company of my fellow-townsmen was taken captive.

"After traveling six days, we came to the river Chebar at twilight on the seventh day. Here we halted. I ate my bread with tears and fell asleep. Behold! I saw in a dream a handsome youth, with sparkling eyes. He was richly clothed and was mounted on a fiery horse. He bore a sword at his side and wore a glistening helmet on his head. His raven-black locks played about his neck. His cheeks were like ruddy apples. His brow was white as snow, and pure as milk. When I beheld his figure, which seemed as if carved from sapphire, I wept bitterly and cried 'Oh! my Lord God, I also had children as handsome as this young man, now there is none to close my eyes or reap the fruits of my labor!' When the young man heard my lamentation, he alighted from his horse, grasped my right hand and said to me, in a clear, ringing voice, 'My soul longs after Thamar, thy grand-daughter. My desire is so great, it longs to bring thee out of thy captivity, that thou mayest go back with me to

thy loved ones in Zion, to share there in the light of God.' I asked him his name, descent and family. He answered, 'My words must remain hidden until they are revealed.' Then he showed me the ring which I gave Thamar and said, 'This is the token of our covenant, which my beloved Thamar has given me.' Here I awoke and found it was a dream.

"This wonderful dream fell upon me like a ray of hope in my troubles. I lifted my eyes to the heavens, where the stars shone in the firmament, while the earth was clothed in darkness, and cried to God and besought Him that in like manner the dreams of the night might illumine my soul.

"After a while I fell asleep again. Then I dreamed that I sat in thine ivory palace. Thamar advanced as a bride and this young man, attired in costly raiment, came and stood before us and they gazed lovingly at each other. The youth seemed about to speak to me, when I awoke, and heard the voice of my tormentor, 'Why dost thou sleep? Arise! and prepare to go forward with the prisoners, for the morning broke long since.' I arose with bitterness of heart, but my soul was like one stunned. It astonished me that I had twice seen the same figure. I inquired the meaning from the interpreters of dreams. They told me the dreams were full of significance. Therefore my soul has much hope in Thamar's beloved. He will deliver me from the power of my enemy and become the heir to my hidden treasures in Samaria.

"Therefore, my dear children, retain this dream in your remembrance and ponder it in your hearts. The grace and peace of God be with you all."

Jedidjah and Thirza wept when they read this letter.

Zimri said to them:

"Weep not over thy father, for he escaped from the terrible siege and if he must dwell in a strange land, he will find himself even in distant Assyria still among his own companions. The dream at the river Chebar is also a great consolation to him, for he firmly believes that it will all be fulfilled."

While Zimri spoke, Thirza's eyes rested upon Azrikam, whose figure so little resembled the youth of Hananel's dreams. Jedidjah perceiving this, sent him away.

"Believe not these dreams," he said to his wife, "thy father may cherish this consolation in his misfortune, but thou, my love, depend not upon such things. Do not compare our Azrikam with the youth of the visions, for he does not resemble him in the least. His hair is not black, but of uncertain color, and he is neither slight nor well built. Through such fancies thou wilt turn the heart of Thamar from him. I have made a covenant with Joram, and a dream shall not revoke that which I have promised."

"Who knows?" Thirza persisted. "Perhaps Naomi may have had a son who resembles this youth."

Jedidjah continued:

"Naomi has gone thence with her lover, and even if she has such a son, who could remove from him the disgrace which rests upon his mother? He would ever be known as the son of an abandoned woman, and if Joram were ever to return, he would have no mercy upon him, but would drive him away. Yet why do we argue over an idle tale? Naomi will never return after committing such abominable crimes, for the people would point the finger of scorn at her and besides, the sword of justice hangs over her head. Therefore, my love, let us speak no more of her, and let us forget her name, for she is a blot upon Joram's whole house."

Jedidjah was renowned throughout all Judea for his faithfulness to God, and his love to his fellows. He never observed men closely in order to prove their sincerity, but took them in good faith for what they appeared. An open countenance and a modest demeanor were ever to him evidences of a pure heart. Many took advantage of his unsuspecting nature, and the number of those who, through a show of humility and sincerity, sought to win his favor, constantly increased. It was no wonder that Zimri, by means of a pious demeanor and virtuous conversation, succeeded in establishing himself in his good graces, especially since the high priest had so highly spoken of him.

One day, Jedidjah said to him:

"If thou art content, I will give thee a name and position in my house."

"Sir, I am ready to serve thee with a sincere and faithful heart," Zimri replied.

Zimri had little desire for work and honest gain. He wished to obtain riches with the least possible exertion. As he learned more and more of the condition of affairs in the households of Joram and Jedidjah, he readily perceived that there was a broad field for his foul purposes. Above all things else, he carefully concealed the seal which Hananel had given him for Jedidjah, for he reflected: "This seal will perhaps serve me as a true treasure and a valuable instrument."

Azrikam, at this time, still dwelt in Jedidjah's house. He was now a boy of ten years, and Thamar and Theman, Jedidjah's children, were his playmates. Though still so young, he showed what his disposition was, for he tormented Thamar and Theman and provoked them to quarrel with him whenever possible. This greatly troubled Jedidjah and Thirza. The latter could not refrain from expressing her opinion of the quarrelsome lad.

"The apple falls not far from the tree. Hagith quarreled with all about her, and her son is never easy unless he is quarreling," she said. As for Thamar and Theman, they could not endure Azrikam.

When Jedidjah saw that his friend's son was a disturber in his house, disliked by all, he sent him to live on Joram's land, so that his children should no longer wrangle with him. At the same time, he hoped that while he was away from Thamar's eyes, her heart might turn to him. Jedidjah also gave Achan to Azrikam, with the charge to care for the lad and guard him as the

apple of his eye. Achan was to bring the lad home every Sabbath, every new moon and every holiday. Achan rejoiced over this commission and always came punctually. This secured for him Jedidjah's esteem.

Azrikam grew as a sharp thorn in Joram's household and the older he grew, the homelier he became, but Thamar became more beautiful day by day. They differed greatly, not only in outward appearance, but also in manner and disposition. Azrikam's eyes had no friendly gaze for the servants of his house and his hand was ever closed against the poor. He boasted of his riches and of the reputation of his forefathers, and was ashamed to associate with the boys of his acquaintance who were not the sons of princes. Thamar walked in meekness among her playmates, and never neglected the daughters of the poor. Azrikam was like a wooden idol, covered with gold and silver, which hid its real worthlessness from the beholder. Thamar was like a sapphire set in gold, whose value the noble metal did not enhance but simply lent a brighter luster to it, while Azrikam was awkwardly formed. When he was seventeen, he was still very short. His red-haired head sat like a gourd on his extremely broad shoulders, and his face was thickly covered with freckles. Thamar on the contrary grew in beauty like a palm tree, and when she was sixteen had become a wonderfully beautiful maiden. She was slender, with a graceful carriage. Her voice was clear and sweet. She was the joy of her parents and a true pleasure to all eyes. In a word, Azrikam and Thamar were as

different from each other as could be imagined. Only the firm will of Jedidjah, who would not break his covenant with Joram, sought their union. Many sons of noblemen and princes had already sought to obtain Thamar, but Jedidjah, on account of his promise, refused her hand to all.

Now Thirza had concealed Hananel's letter in a chest. When Thamar had grown up, she found it one day by chance and read it. She reflected much over her grandfather's dreams, and thoughts before unknown began to stir in her mind and the image of the lovely youth followed her, sleeping or waking. The more she thought of the lovely youth the more she hated Azrikam, and when she met him she trembled.

Hananel's letter and Thamar's reveries vexed Azrikam.

One day he called Zimri to his house and said to him:

"See, the letter which thou didst bring with thee from Hananel has turned Thamar's mind from me. Her heart is gradually being alienated from me, because she lives and moves and has her being only in Hananel's dreams, and all her thoughts are upon a youth who never existed. Thou, Zimri, hast estranged her from me; now endeavor through thy wisdom to restore again her heart to me. For this good deed I will richly reward thee, and will give thee what thou dost demand."

"I know that Thamar is dearer to thee than all thy treasures," was Zimri's answer. "I know also, that her heart is removed far from thee, and

that with all thy silver and gold thou canst not purchase it. Still there is nothing which can not be accomplished through craft and deceit, but dishonest hands do nothing without money. When thou shalt place the required sum at my disposal, I shall gladly be at thy service. I have already a plan in my mind. Give me three days in which to consider it."

Three days after, Azrikam inquired of Zimri if he had completed his plans. He answered: "Above all else, thou must give me thine absolute confidence. We must first seek to shake Thamar's faith in the dreams which stand in thy way. We must make her doubtful of their truth or remove them from her knowledge, but I must find the means to turn her heart gradually to thee. Now give me three hundred silver shekels, with which I will hire a man to carry out my plans. Still, I repeat, trust me entirely. Thus only can I succeed."

To which Azrikam replied:

"Thou knowest that I cling fast to money, still no price is too dear for me to win Thamar. Thou shalt receive tenfold from me, when thou hast concluded the matter."

Zimri then betook himself to a man who lived on the borders of Judea, gave him Hananel's seal, presented him with a sum of money and put into his mouth the words which he should say to Jedidjah.

This man went to Jedidjah and said:

"Thy servant has just returned from Assyria, where I saw Hananel upon his death bed. He called me to him and asked, 'Art not thou from

Judea?' When I answered him that I was, he continued: 'If the Lord shall deliver thee from captivity, carry this to my son-in-law in Zion and say to him—' Here his speech failed him. He became confused and could utter only disconnected words: 'I buried my treasure—and swear to me—tell no one about it.' He became speechless and never finished his message. The death angel had seized him and he remained palsied. The next day he died. God has brought me back to my fatherland and I have brought you his seal."

Jedidjah heard the man's story, then he took the messenger to his wife, related to her what the man had told him, and exclaimed:

"All our hopes have come to naught!"

Thirza could not believe her husband. She thought he was deceiving her in order to shake Thamar's faith in Hananel's dreams. Jedidjah swore to her that it was no falsehood. She now believed him, and wept bitterly over her father's death. Thamar also mourned for Hananel, but she ceased not to hate Azrikam.

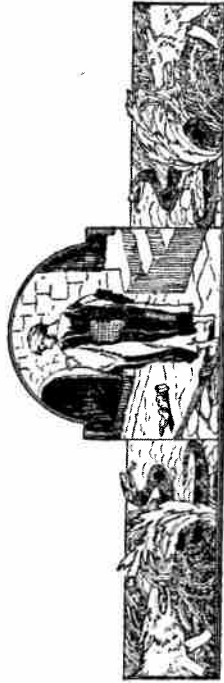
When her father spoke to her on the matter, she replied:

"So long as Azrikam remains at home, I willingly honor him, but when he appears before my eyes he brings his shame with him. I loathe him for his ungainly figure and arrogant demeanor. I shall never overcome this feeling."

Thirza interposed and said to Jedidjah:

"My love, cease to urge our daughter until she is eighteen or twenty. That will be soon enough to entrust Azrikam with her life."

When Azrikam perceived that Zimri already knew too much about him, and that his reputation hung on Zimri's words, he feared lest his deceit should be made known to Thamar. He therefore at once gave him another thousand silver shekels and henceforth had no secrets from him.



CHAPTER IV

PEASANT AND PRINCESS

AT the return of spring, Thamar asked her father to permit her to leave the noisy city and to accompany her young friends into the country, there to enjoy the springtime. Jedidjah, who could never deny her anything, consented, but instructed her to return in three days. Thamar, with her maid, Maacah, went to Bethlehem, to the house of Abisai, the overseer of Joram's flocks and herds. Her father sent Theman, his son, with three servants to Mt. Carmel, where they were to remain with Sithri until the time of vintage, when Theman was to take the first fruits to Jerusalem to present them as a thank offering before the Lord.

Bethlehem, the cradle of the kings of Judea, lay south of Jerusalem, on a pleasant hill, and was a lovely spot. It abounded in cisterns and running streams of sweet water, clear as crystal. Fruitful olive trees cast their broad shadows and the grapes yielded dark, luscious wine. Its hills were girt about with joy and gladness. Its valleys were filled with roses and all sorts of fragrant flowers. There the little lambs skipped about, the children sported and the land flowed with milk and honey. Solomon himself had made

there three pools, which served as reservoirs for clear water, which was conducted by a canal to the fountains at Jerusalem, the city of his delight. These pools shone through the green trees, like patches of silver. Beautiful willows, in whose branches pigeons and turtle-doves cooed, grew on their banks.

In this neighborhood Amnon tended the sheep of Abisai, his father Joram's steward. He was ignorant of his origin, but supposed he was a shepherd's son. His companions and all the shepherds in the place admired him on account of his fine figure and his musical talents, for he knew how to play the lute skillfully and to sing charming songs, which delighted all hearts.

The sons and daughters of the noblemen had come up to Bethlehem to enjoy the spring weather. Thamar, radiant with beauty, and clad in costly purple garments, was among the number. She abode at the house of Abisai. One morning she went with her maid, Maacah, to the shepherd's pastures, where Amnon was feeding his flocks. The shepherds saw her, and filled with wonder, they said to each other:

"Behold! she is the most beautiful of Zion's daughters."

Amnon said to them:

"Shepherds! why look ye upon that which is above us? Let us instead look down upon the resting-place of our flocks, for ought we to lift our eyes to the daughters of the nobles?"

Notwithstanding his words, he could not refrain from glancing back at her and observing from a distance her graceful gait.

The sun poured his beams over fields and meadows, and spread heat and light abroad. The little water brooks bubbled and murmured. A gentle breeze swept through the tree-tops and lightly stirred the leaves. The notes of the little birds rang out on the air; the bleating of the sheep and the lowing of the cattle joined in the chorus of the shepherds, and the mountains echoed the joyful sound.

Thamar and her maid returned the way they had come, and when they again reached the place where Amnon tended his sheep, he, unwilling to be outdone by his companions, lifted his voice in a song.

Both rich and poor in heavenly gifts rejoice;
It is not so with the delights of men;

In these the rich precede the poor in choice,
However, they are earthly and are vain.

On rich and poor the sun of righteousness
Doth shine. Together both rejoice in spring,
When God the fields and pastures green doth bless
With harvest rich, and shepherds pipe and sing.

The city and its noise doth God bestow
Upon the rich. Spring comes and roses fair,
Then forth unto the shepherd's home they go,
And seek what God hath given us to share.

Crowns wrought of gold and many a precious stone
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press.
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone
With which he decks the chosen shepherdess.

Meanwhile Thamar and her maid had seated themselves on the banks of a brook, not far away.

When she heard Amnon's song, she said to her companion, "If thou hast ears to hear, listen, and if thou hast eyes to see, look around thee!"

"Spring has scattered her gifts with bountiful hands," Maacah replied. "Whether we ride or walk, we find here loveliness, which the cities with their walls and houses lack. Now, my mistress, let us ascend the hill and view the shepherds' ranks. See, yonder they join with the shepherdesses in a round dance, and the noblemen's daughters look on with delight."

"Leave me alone," replied Thamar. "I sit here as if rooted to the spot, for the image of my dream stands before me. O happiness! I see with my own eyes the youth of whom my grandfather dreamed. He stands before me exactly as Hananel described him. Fasten thine eyes upon the shepherd, singing yonder. See his black locks, his fine, noble figure, carved, as it were, from sapphire. Is he not purer than milk and whiter than snow? How red are his cheeks! How pleasantly he moves his lips, and how sweetly his voice rings! He holds a bow in his hands. If he bore a helmet on his head, he would resemble a lordly hero in battle."

Maacah had closely observed Amnon and was also pleased with him, yet she said to Thamar:

"Nevertheless, thou shouldst not depend too much upon empty dreams, which only confuse thee and rob thee of discretion. See, Hananel is certainly dead and all his visions were idle fancies. I can easily give thee a reason for the bow in his

hand. When the Jordan rises in the spring, it is needful for the shepherds to go to the pastures armed with bow and arrow, for then the lion comes out of his lair, and the tigers, panthers and all the other wild beasts are driven out of their lurking-places by the water. They cause great destruction and render whole stretches of land unsafe. For this reason the shepherds gird themselves as heroes rushing to battle. Come now, mistress, let us mingle with the crowd, gathered on yonder hill."

Thamar would not listen to Maacah's words, but approached Amnon and said to him:

"Youth, if thy heart be as good as thy countenance, then give me the wreath which thou holdest in thine hands."

Amnon turned pale as Thamar thus addressed him.

"Take it, my lady, if thou dost not disdain receiving this token of homage from me," he answered quietly.

Thamar continued:

"I heard thee singing:

Crowns, wrought of gold and many a precious stone
The brows of kings adorn, of princes press.
Wild roses are the shepherd's crown alone
With which he decks the chosen shepherdess.'

Doubtless there is a maiden whom thou wilt gladly adorn as bride. Have I judged rightly?"

Amnon cast his eyes to the ground and replied:

"I swear to thee, my lady, that among the

thousands of maidens whom I have seen, until this day I have found no companion."

"Thou must be a very proud young man," said Thamar, "if thou seekest thy mate among ten thousand."

Maacah seized her mistress by the hand and said:

"Break off this conversation, and let us go from thence. I see a man coming hither, and it is not becoming a maiden to talk in such a manner."

So Thamar and Maacah departed, and Uz, one of Abisai's shepherds, came to Amnon and inquired:

"What said Jedidjah's daughter to thee?" Amnon answered:

"I knew not that she was Jedidjah's daughter. Yet see, her lips drop sweetness like morning dew from roses. I am truly angry with thee because thou hast interrupted our interview."

Uz replied:

"Behold! Amnon, how high thou raisest thine eyes. Verily Thamar is handsome and lovingly in manner. She girds herself with virtue and humility and is not haughty like the daughters of Jerusalem, who disregard the poor and suffer them to depart without consolation. No, Thamar is not so. She stretches out her hand to relieve their need and encourages the afflicted and cast-down with friendly words. This morning, when she entered the vineyard, it seemed to me as if Aurora herself had descended and walked before me. She resembles a tender rose, bathed in morning dew."

"To me," replied Amnon, "she appears splendid as Jerusalem, glorious and brilliant as the morning sun. Loveliness and grace, beauty and meekness have united in her. Still why should I desecrate her beauty with the words of my mouth? Her image dwells deep within my heart, yet my lips fail to describe her. In a word, if this maiden should walk among the stars, she would shine like the morning star. When she walks upon the earth, the roses turn pale and are ashamed."

Uz spoke again and said:

"Cease speaking of those things which are so infinitely above thee. Forget not that thou art only a shepherd. Busy thyself with thy flocks. Care for thy lambs and be no idle dreamer."

Thamar, after they had left Amnon, said to Maacah:

"O! that I might tarry in this place my whole life long, for the wreath of flowers which adorns the shepherd's head is dearer to me than the costliest veils, bracelets and chains, wherewith the daughters of Zion adorn their necks, and the tone of his shepherd's pipe is sweeter than all the lutes and harps in the pleasure gardens of Jerusalem."

Maacah laughed as she replied:

"Yes, that young shepherd casts a spirit of sweetness over the meadows. Therefore thou art now dreaming with open eyes. Still, my mistress, I warn thee, suffer not these fantasies of thine to lead thee astray, for even if Hananel himself were living, who could exalt this shepherd to your position?"

"Cease to mock, thou fool," said Thamar. "Verily he is only a simple shepherd, but a lofty and gentle spirit pervades his whole appearance, which even his shepherd's clothing cannot conceal. How delightful are his songs, how attractive his conversation, how handsome his figure! Amiability beams from his eyes and his lips are like a pair of tulips. Could I take him to my mother's house, she would agree with me, and would not mistake these signs. Has he not the figure and appearance of the youth whom Hananel saw in his dreams? Differs he in the least?" Conversing thus they reached Abisai's house.

When evening came, Amnon collected his flocks and laid himself down to rest with the other shepherds. Thamar, likewise, repaired to her apartment and sought her couch, but sleep fled from her eyelids and she longed for the coming of the morning, for she had determined, as soon as it was day, to return alone to the spot where she had seen the youth, and if possible to ascertain his origin.

* * *

On this night the lions had broken into the sheepfolds and caused great devastation. When the shepherds awoke and discovered that ravenous thieves had stolen into their flocks, they girded on their swords, took their spears in their hands, held their bows in readiness and concealed themselves in the deep thickets of the woods.

Thamar knew nothing of this night's horrors. She arose with the morning light and went, with-

out her companion, to the spot where she had spoken to the youth. There she heard the shouting of the shepherds in the distance. They had just espied a fierce lion who had already strangled many sheep and cattle. Thamar knew not what the noise meant, hence paid no attention to it. She went forward, wrapt in thought, and plucking flowers with which she made a fragrant wreath. When she approached the brook she saw Amnon standing on the opposite side watering his flocks. Her heart beat violently. The shepherd also became confused. Like two doves who bow their heads to drink, their images were reflected in the clear stream. They gazed at their shadows, but dared not look each other in the face. Finally, Thamar took courage, and smiling sweetly, said:

"I have come to discharge my debt," at the same time holding out a wreath of flowers; but he answered:

"See, my lady, a stream flows between thee and me and my hand is too short to receive thy gift."

"If thy hand be too short, mine, on the contrary, is strong and skillful," said Thamar, and she threw the wreath across the brook to Amnon. In a moment, Amnon, with a voice full of anguish, shouted:

"Save thyself, my lady, save thyself!"

Thamar turned and instantly became motionless from fright, for from the woods there issued a fierce lion awful to behold. With mane floating in the wind, with tail outstretched, he rushed nearer and nearer. His fiery eyes rolled, his jaws were like an open grave, his red tongue thirsted

for blood. He came rushing upon Amnon's herd, which he had spied from the opposite side of the brook. He crouched down and was already about to spring, when Amnon, quick as lightning, bent his bow, shot, and in a trice the lion, roaring loudly, fell, for Amnon's arrow had pierced his heart. Not ten yards distant from Thamar, who had become insensible, he fell dead on the bank.

Amnon, who had not trembled before the lion, became frightened at the sight of the fainting maiden. He left his herd, rushed through the stream, and stood irresolute before Thamar. He cried to her with a loud voice and his tears fell on her cheeks. Then he shook her until she revived. She opened her eyes, saw the fallen lion and heard Amnon's words as he spoke gently to her: "Calm thyself, thou nobleman's daughter. Fear not. See, the danger is over and the terror of death is past. The Lord God strengthened the arm of thy servant, that his arrow reached the heart of the fierce lion, and now thou art saved. Look upon him as he lies there bleeding, and be of good cheer."

Thamar's heart was still fearful and her mind was overwhelmed with joy and terror. She looked with tearful eyes, first up to heaven and then at the friend who had saved her life. Her soul overflowed with thankfulness, yet her lips remained silent. Amnon continually endeavored to inspire her with courage until she again came to herself. At last she spoke:

"Oh! God, thou who workest wonders, what man can remain steadfast when in a moment he

sees life and death so near each other? I, a weak maiden, have seen them meeting and how shall I recover myself? The storm in my soul seeks for rest. There he lies before me, the frightful lion. His fangs are like sharp swords and his eyes, even in death, stare at me as if he would rend my heart and devour my limbs," and clasping Amnon's hand, she continued, "Only thy courage, oh youth! and thy powerful right arm saved me from the devouring beast. Thou wast my defender in the greatest peril and as an angel of mercy thou didst hasten to my relief. Thou hast done such great things for me that no thanks will ever be able to pay my debt."

Amnon modestly answered:

"The help came alone from God. He guided my hand to slay the beast of prey. Therefore, arise and thank the Lord, thy deliverer."

Thamar asked the shepherd his name. "They call me Amnon," he replied.

"I will also henceforth call thee Amnon," said Thamar. "I pray thee, Amnon, my lifesaver, take these bracelets in remembrance of this hour. I do not offer them to thee as a reward for thy deed, but only that therewith my name may remain in thy memory, that thou mayest not forget me. Thy reward rests with my father. He will open his hand generously and promote thee, because a brave youth like thee should not tarry with shepherds, nor hide himself among the low-born. The wild beasts of the forest should no longer disturb thy slumbers, nor the trees of the woods listen to thy charming speech. Jedidjah, my father, is a prince in Judea. He has great

possessions and far-reaching power. He is in a position to raise thee from poverty."

"Oh princess, urge me not to take this present from thine hand. See, I am only a poor shepherd and if I think of thee I should forget the world and the fullness thereof," Amnon replied, with tears flowing down his cheeks.

Then Thamar said:

"The tears which hang like pearls on thine eyelashes are tokens to me that thou wilt not forget me, as I unto this day have never forgotten thee."

"When hast thou ever before seen me?" asked Amnon in amazement.

She laughingly made answer:

"In dreams, which God has this day brought to pass, so that I might while awake behold thee."

But Amnon said:

"Forgive me, my lady, thou speakest to me in riddles, and I can not understand thee."

Thamar continued in a friendly tone:

"When thou dost go up to the Feast at Jerusalem come to my father's house. Then thou wilt understand this riddle and find an opportunity to gain distinction, either among the great warriors, or among the sons of the prophets who are supported from my father's bounty. I charge thee by the roes and hinds of the fields to regard my petition, thereby thou wilt gain advantage to thyself. Meanwhile, abide here in peace and God be with thee. Think sometimes of Thamar, who also will think of thee, with ardent affection, and to eternity will never forget Amnon."

Maacah came to seek her mistress. When she saw the dead lion she shrieked loudly. Then Thamar told her how the shepherd had rescued her, but the latter said:

"See, thou art to blame for this, because thou didst thoughtlessly pursue thy way."

Thamar charged Maacah not to disclose this nor anything else to her father, except the fact that the youth saved her life. Maacah who had herself gone out to seek him, whom Thamar had found, for she had been devoted to Amnon since she first saw him, rejoiced when she knew that her mistress had invited him to come to Jedidjah's house to dwell with them under the same roof.

Thamar and Maacah now went on their way to Abisai's house. Thamar, from time to time, turned and looked back upon Amnon. He was busily skinning the lion for he wished to use the skin as a covering for his mule.

* * *

One day, when Uz visited the herds, he found Amnon sunk in deep thought. He was seated on a stone holding in his hand a shriveled white rose, which he thus addressed:

"Thou tender little rose, how beautiful thou didst become after the morning awoke thee and filled thy cup with the dew of heaven! Tall trees then looked upon thee with envy. Thou didst bloom and brighten and become more lovely until noon-day. Then the parching heat withered thee. The dew dried and thy countenance paled. Thou art spoiled and withered, thou poor little

flower. Verily, verily, the grass of the field and the flowers of the meadow are our teachers. The sky is spread open before us like an endless book and the earth with all that lives and moves thereon is as a scroll, which the Lord God himself has filled with wonderful writing. The Lord says to man, 'Read in this great book and learn therefrom all thy life long, then thou wilt act wisely and intelligently.' Like the rose, man grows and blooms in the morning dew of his youth, until love with her joy and pain awakens him and destroys his innocence. Her fiery beams wither his heart like the grass, for his soul cannot find that which it seeks."

"What ails thee, Amnon?" asked Uz. "For some time I have observed thee with amazement. Thine appearance is altered. Thy behavior is incomprehensible to me and all thy words and deeds are unintelligible. Thou seekest the most secluded spot in the woods and tarriest there like a hermit-crow and thou dost wander like a deer from brook to spring. From the hour when the sun rises until the weary day declines, thou art running from mountain to mountain and from valley to valley not knowing what thou seekest. One can hardly trust thee with thy flocks. See! thy lambs are scattered. They seek their food here and there and thou observest it not, because thou art absent-minded. Thou pursuest all sorts of visions and thy mouth speaks riddles."

Amnon answered:

"Listen, Uz, and thou shalt hear incredible things. Thou knowest Thamar. Of her my heart never dared to think. See, I have rescued

her from a fierce lion which followed our shepherds. His carcass lies hidden in the woods yonder. Thamar has kindly urged me to come to Jerusalem and there dwell under the shelter of her father's roof. For this reason I am so perplexed, when I think of the honor which Thamar would allot me in her father's house."

Uz was astonished at hearing these words and said:

"Hast thou performed this and hast not told it to any man? I pity thee, Amnon, for such thoughts as thou art cherishing appear charming as the doves, whose wings glitter with green and gold, but who quarrel in the market like the ravens of the valley. Wilt thou ascend higher than the eagle who flies to the sun, or wilt thou outrun the hinds on the mountains? Drive these visions from thy mind, then thou wilt forget thy sorrow and disquiet."

Uz related all that had happened to Abisai. He was alarmed and sent Amnon to Bozrah to buy sheep. Jedidjah, not long after, invited Amnon to visit him, but his messenger was told that Amnon tarried in Bozrah.



that olive tree, spreading abroad its branches, laden with ripe fruit, dropping fatness! Its oil also shall be the Lord's, and shall be poured out in the sanctuary, as God has poured out his blessings upon our land."

Theman thus addressed the vine-dressers:

"Ye shall not keep the gleanings, but what remains shall be for the strangers, the widows and the orphans. Eat as many grapes as you desire, but do not forbid those sad-hearted ones, who have come hither to forget their poverty and misery. Give to the thirsty; drive them not away. Reproach them not, for who knows what the future may bring us? Perhaps it may come to pass that our sons and daughters may be hungry and thirsty, and seek nourishment and refreshment in the stranger's fields and vineyards. Therefore, leave the gleanings for the poor, for that is the toll which we pay to God, who has blessed the labor of our hands."

The vine-dressers were all active. They sang and shouted over their work. Young men and maidens emptied their baskets into the tubs which the porters carried to the wine-press. Two men stood by the press talking together. The first said:

"The wine is clear as the dew of heaven, wherein the morning light is reflected."

The second answered:

"Therefore shall this wine be brought unto the house of God, because it is full of the sweetness of the sun in the heavens."

And the wine-treaders, who trod out the grapes, shouted:

CHAPTER V

THE HARVEST

HEMAN, in accordance with his father's command, went to Mt. Carmel, where Sithri was delighted to see him. One day they arose very early and walked through the vineyards and gardens. The morning sun, with its resplendent rays, gilded Mt. Carmel. The vineyards resounded with joy and pleasure as the vine-dressers sang their sweet melodies.

Theman, with his three servants, entered the nearest vineyards. He said to the workmen: "Ye laborers in the vineyards, listen to my words. Every branch on the vines which I bind with a rush ye shall leave untouched, for it is holy, and the fruits which grow thereon ye shall also leave, for they are the first fruits, the portions of the priests. Behold the vines in the valley, whose branches spread over the mountains and are laden with an abundance of blessings! The vines bend under the weight of the fruit. These grapes are full of ruby-tinted wine. Yonder I see figs and pomegranates peeping out among the dark foliage. They seem to invite me to pluck them and carry them as gifts to the Sanctuary. These are rightly called the 'firstlings,' and their wine should be placed before the Lord. Behold

"Heigho! Heigho! Doth not wine rejoice both God and man? It is poured upon the altar, as a sweet-smelling offering to the Lord. To the aged who drink it, it will bring back joy and youth."

The noon-day hour came on. The hands of the wine-dressers were weary. They stretched themselves in the shady corners of the vineyards, and mingled their talk with playful, harmless jests. Here a boy climbed up a date palm and had almost clasped the top with his hands, when he slipped down to the ground, amid the laughter of his companions. Yonder a little girl ran after a boy, who had given her a sound box on the ear. Another swung a branch with hanging grapes in her hand, and, when near enough to the boy, she struck him in the face with it until it became red. Finally, amid general laughter, he begged for grace. Thus they amused themselves until the noon-day meal.

The man strolled about the vineyards and lo, hidden away among the vine branches, was a lone maiden, gathering gleanings, heeding not the noise and merriment of the young people. From time to time a tear fell upon her cheek, but her tears were like the zephyr which plays over the roses of Sharon, and only added to her beauty and sweetness. The tears were succeeded by an earnest look from her dove-like eyes, which, like a sunbeam, shed a serene light over her sad countenance.

The man was astonished at the singular beauty of this maiden, a beauty such as he had never before beheld. He stood rooted to the spot un-

able to withdraw his gaze. He sighed and said to himself:

"Alas! that such a one should be allotted to a poor man, for verily a son of need will lead her home. Oh, God! thou hast given me honor and riches. A nobleman's daughter has been allotted to me. Oh take all this from me and bestow it upon another! Give the honor to the nobles and counsel to kings and the wealth to the charitable. The prince's daughter rejoices in silk, purple and costly apparel. Give me this maiden, and I will not exchange her for the king's daughter in all her glory. Grant me on thy great earth, only a small piece of ground, a little vineyard. Give me a humble cottage, wherein I can dwell alone with this one, and I shall be happy."

As he stood lost in thought, and was about to ask the maiden her family and name, a lad came to invite him to return to the laborers in the vineyard, who were unwilling to eat their dinner until he had blessed the bread and wine, for Sithri was not in the vineyard.

The man went to perform this service, but when he returned after a short time, the maiden had disappeared. He searched throughout the garden in vain. He continued this search for several days, but could nowhere discover her. He became very uneasy and was troubled for three days.

The man went on the fourth day, with two servants, to hunt on Mt. Carmel. A stately deer came stalking out of the woods. He went majestically along with uplifted head, and, kinglike, he bore his horns as a crown. No sooner did

he perceive Theman, than he fled by a steep and rough path to escape. Instead of coming into the open space, he plunged deeper and deeper into the forest. Theman ordered his servant to pursue the beast into the thicket, but he himself slowly followed, until straying from the right path he lost his way. He cried aloud to his companions, but received no answer. Silence reigned around him. He wandered about for a long time, not knowing which way to take. At last he saw in the distance, something white fluttering in the breeze. He hastened thither, and lo, the maiden whom he had seen in the vineyard! She beamed from the darkness of the woods like the rosy light of the morning. She came from her cottage which stood in a chasm of the rock. When she perceived Theman, she trembled and darted back, but he reassured her:

"Fear not, thou lovely one. I will only entreat thee for one thing. God has let me unexpectedly find thee. Therefore restore to me that which thou hast taken from me."

"What have I taken from thee, my lord?" she tearfully asked. "Far be it from thy servant to take anything which does not belong to her. I was for four days in your vineyard, yet I took naught from the full branches, save only the gleanings, for see, my lord, the gleanings of the field and the vineyard are the only nourishment of thy servant and her mother."

Theman asked:

"Who is thy mother, and to which tribe and thousand doth thy father belong?"

"My father is dead. I have never known him, but my mother knows his tribe and thousand."

When Theman asked where she and her mother dwelt, if it was in the hut in the rocks, she added:

"My mother has gone away and will not return for three days. Yet tell me, my lord, why hast thou put me in such misery and unrest by desiring me to return to thee that which I have never taken from thee?"

"Thou hast robbed me of much, thou who art lovely as a hind and graceful as a roe. Give sleep to my eyes and rest again to my heart, for they have departed from me since I have seen thee," was Theman's reply.

The maiden blushed and became greatly embarrassed, but she did not venture to contradict him.

However, she asked:

"Sir, what hast thou found in thy maiden?"

"The whole world and the glory thereof," cried Theman, and immediately took a ring from his hand and passed it to her, saying:

"Tell me thy name."

"I am here called Susanna," was her reply.

"Thy name is well suited to thee," said Theman. "Therefore know thou, thou tender rose, as this sapphire is enclosed in the gold of this ring, so also shall dwell thy lovely image in my heart forever and ever. Two ways are open before me. I must either raise thee up to me, and thou shalt dwell in a splendid palace, with

rich apartments, at my side, or I shall descend to thee and dwell in this cottage."

The maiden gazed at Theman in astonishment and said:

"How good thou art, my lord, and how great is thy favor. See, I dwell here with my mother, and the place is already too small for us; why shouldst thou leave thy lordly place to live here, where no man dwells? Nevertheless, return here in three days. Then my mother will answer thee. I have no voice in the matter."

Theman could no longer restrain himself. He kissed her, saying:

"Thou art right, my love. I will speak with thy mother. Now show me the way to Sithri's house."

Susanna showed him a forsaken path, which he followed to Sithri's house, where he waited impatiently for the third day.

On the morrow Sithri collected the first fruits and brought them to Theman to carry to Jerusalem. They also took the choicest of the fruit, placed it in gold and silver baskets, as was their custom, and hung young pigeons and turtle doves around them. They loaded two mules with the gifts and early in the morning started on their way. The chosen ox walked at the head of the company. His horns were gilded and his head was crowned with a wreath of olive leaves, to show that he was the king of the domestic animals. "For where no oxen are the crib is empty, but much increase is by the strength of the ox." The ox patiently bears his master's yoke, while he goes through the field and plows

it, yet he has scarcely finished this hard task, before he must bid farewell to the valleys and carry much fruit for men to eat. He can not even satisfy himself with that which he has helped to produce, for he travels the holy way to Jerusalem, there to end his life. By his death he gives cheer alike to God and man. To God he gives his fat and blood as a thank-offering; to his master he gives his flesh as savory food.

When they had gone some distance on their journey Theman called to his servants:

"Go slowly on your way. I will return to Carmel, where I have a matter to settle. I will overtake you towards evening."

He mounted his swiftest mule and rode like one borne on a swift wind to Susanna's cottage. When he reached it he could not find what he sought.

He was met by a strange old woman, who gave him the sapphire from his ring, saying:

"The Philistine woman who dwells here, in respect to her daughter, Susanna, said: 'The sapphire has been broken from the ring, and no earthly power can restore it again.'"

Theman clasped his hands. "Where have the two women gone? Reveal it, and I will give thee whatever thou requirest," he cried.

The old woman answered:

"I know as little as thyself whither they are gone, and can only deliver to thee the message which the Philistine woman left in my charge. Still, she further told me she never more expected to return here."

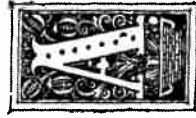
Theman, with a sad heart, turned back to overtake his servants. He arrived at Jerusalem in safety, and Jedidjah presented the first fruits in the Temple, according to the custom and commandment, but Theman remained sad and miserable. He concealed the cause of his sorrow from his parents.



CHAPTER VI

THE SHEPHERD IN THE PALACE

“By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth. I sought him, but I found him not.”—Solomon’s Song, iii, 1.



AUTUMN had come, and on the fourteenth day of the seventh month Thamar stood at the window of her room, which looked upon the East street, and distributed alms, for on the evening before the Feast she gave money to the converted Gentiles, the poor, the widows and orphans, that they might enjoy the holiday. She also sent many to her father’s garners and cellars where Theman and Zimri distributed grain, wine and oil.

Thirza, with one of her house servants, entered. She bore five changes of raiment which she had prepared for the shepherd, Amnon, the rescuer of her daughter.

She showed them to Thamar, saying:

“Thou sayest, my daughter, that the youth of Bethlehem is alike in size with this lad. I have had these garments fitted upon him, so keep them with thee, until the youth comes. Then they shall belong to him.”

Thamar asked:

"Mother, is not my life worth more to thee than these garments?"
Thirza laughed.

"Why dost thou ask this, my child? They will delight the shepherd, who is not accustomed to splendid attire."

She then ordered the servants to carry thirty upper garments to the sons of the prophets, whom she had invited to dinner the next day.

Thamar placed the garments which had been allotted to her friend in a chest, and returned to her work of righteousness, which she continued until the evening meal.

Azrikam came to her then and said:

"Alms are not intended to be given out by tender hands, yet thou art not content with the gifts to the poor, but hast also spoken kind words to the poor and despised."

"Knowest thou then, Azrikam, what has driven these people into poverty and shame, that thou also scornest them?" she asked indignantly.
"Knowest thou of a truth, that they have committed mischief, injustice or violence? No! then they may have fallen into poverty through their simplicity and ignorance. Whoever closes his ears against them must have a heart of stone, which their tears can not soften."

"Oh, indeed!" cried Azrikam. "These people love the bread of idleness, therefore they are poor. He who works not should not eat. For this reason I have directed my steward, Achan, to give them what they need, and also seven strokes for their indolence. This has worked well.

It has strengthened their hands for labor, and many have ceased to knock at my door."

"That I can readily believe," replied Thamar.
"Many have ceased to knock at thy door, because thy house is to them like a dragon's den. Still if these unfortunates dared to open their mouths and speak openly to thee, thus could they question thee: 'Tell us, Azrikam, in what respect art thou better than we are that thou dost consider us idle and negligent? Tell us, thou man of many occupations, thy sheep and pastures, and the riches which God hath given thee, do they not exist to pamper thy body? To sit at a well-filled table with thy hand at thy mouth, and thy teeth moving between thy lips, this is thy business. Impose on us a similar burden and we will joyfully perform it, our teeth shall bite and our jaws chew with pleasure.'"

"Oh! Thamar! why wilt thou set thyself up as the protector of those who lie in the dust, and how darest thou thus to speak to a prince of Judea, the lord of thy youth," he said with displeasure.

"Pardon me, Azrikam, still why didst thou hasten to my father's house before the holidays, only to begin a quarrel with me?"

"I was weary and lonesome at home, so I came here to see if thine eye had a friendly look, or thy mouth a kind word for me, and I am disappointed, for what I expected I have neither seen nor heard. Thou knowest thou art not homely, and thou reliest upon thy beauty to prevent my resenting thy forwardness." Thereupon he sought to embrace her, and continued, "I am

angry with God for bestowing grace and beauty upon thee, for otherwise I would speak to thee differently."

Thamar, with loathing, endeavored to free herself from his arms, and cried angrily:

"Enough of this mockery! Depart from me! I also am angry with God who has given me grace and beauty, because therewith have I found grace in thy sight."

Still Azrikam did not yield, but implored her:

"Tell me, beloved of my soul, how can I win thy favor?"

Thamar answered:

"By hating me."

Then Azrikam's courage failed him. "Oh! that my mind was firm and my heart hard enough to break the bond of my love for thee, then my fetters would fall."

Thamar replied:

"Thou art only fettered by what thine eyes behold, and if thou hadst respected what thine ears heard, thy fetters would long since have melted in the fire of thine anger."

Azrikam again retorted:

"Oh, no! I can not be angry with thee, for thy beauty which ravishes mine eyes appeases mine anger. Could I but free myself from thy charms, I would return unto thine own bosom all the abuse and invectives which thou hast hurled against me. Yet on account of thine imperious will, this will I do—I will choose another wife. My will shall govern thee, and my wish

be thy wages, until thou hast learned from them how to value a prince of Judea."

Thamar with a sigh said:

"I long since knew thy ways, yet to-day thou hast vouchsafed me the favor to teach me the manners of the woman whom thou wilt take to thyself that I may be wise enough to know the value of a prince of Judea. Still all this is in the distant future. If I have indeed found grace in thine eyes, I beseech thee, thou prince in Judea, to depart from me, for thy words only burden me, and my soul longs for rest."

"Ever since I knew thee thou hast always been opposed to me, yet, for the last five months since thine escape from the lions, the great fright which befell thee has roused a disturbing spirit in thee, and thou art as stubborn as the wild ass of the wilderness."

"Leave me, I will dwell alone like the wild beast," said Thamar, rising up.

Azrikam went angrily away. After he had gone she burst into tears.

"How long shall this monster torment me? Oh, God! thou who bringest the night to an end, make also an end to the love with which Azrikam loves me."

Thamar remained in her room and sat at the window gazing out sadly upon the East street. The setting sun gilded the Tower of David until it gleamed like fire, and from the suspended shields and trophies of war glanced beams of light. Multitudes thronged the streets of Zion. Many strangers were present from other cities. They had come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles

at Jerusalem. It was a holiday, and the citizens had left their business and remained at home with their wives and children to have a merry time on the evening before the Feast. Thamar was sad. She gazed upon the bright spectacle which presented itself before her eyes, yet she silently longed after the image which she had so long borne in her heart.

The door turned on its hinges, yet she heard it not. Maacah entered, but she paid no attention to her. Maacah spoke and said:

"My mistress, why art thou so uneasy and depressed when every countenance beams with joy? Thy thoughts tarry in the distance."
 "No," answered her mistress, "they tarry between heaven and earth—between Amnon and Azrikam. Here I stand in my watch-tower, and look longingly out for Amnon to come to my father's house as he promised me at Bethlehem. I see a multitude in the streets who have flocked here from distant cities, and thousands of pilgrims who have come up to God's House, yet I find no trace of Amnon. Oh, that no evil hath befallen him! I learned from a wayfarer that he left Bozrah ten days ago, and started homeward. Perhaps some accident hath happened to him on the journey, for he brought herds with him from Bozrah. My soul hovers over an abyss of countless thoughts, which move to and fro whenever I think of him. For this reason I am uneasy and melancholy."

The day ended and evening came when the Feast of Tabernacles began. Men left their dwellings and ate in the booths. One cried to

another, "Mikra Kodesh!" "Holy convocation" (the Feast greeting). Groups of noblemen met in the street, and greeted each other with happy faces. Great multitudes assembled themselves to drink cider and wine. Everywhere there was joy and song and the City of God exulted and was merry.

Thamar alone grieved because Amnon had not appeared, and her longing desire was fixed upon him. She went sadly to her couch to pass a sleepless night.

The young day awoke. The sunbeams gleamed through Thamar's windows and played on the folds of the purple hangings with which the bed was surrounded, lest the morning sun should too early awaken the fair sleeper. Darkness still rested upon her couch, and lovely morning-dreams played about and fanned her with their soft wings; for toward day-break her troubles and torment like frightened night-birds flew away and were forgotten, and pleasant dreams floated lovingly past her which her heart caught one after another in their flight.

She awoke with Amnon's name on her lips for she had dreamed of her friend. Now she was sorrowful, because awake she could no longer refresh herself with his image.

Maacah stepped softly to her couch and said:

"Arouse thyself! Make thyself ready, my mistress, for to-day is God's holyday. Put on thine attire and let us go and gaze upon the beauty of the Lord, and the joy of his people on

his Holy Hill. See, they have already led the cattle out of the stable, and the sheep out of the fold, for peace-offerings and whole-offerings."

With these words she drew back the curtains. The sunbeams illuminated Thamar's countenance and she exclaimed:

"How lovely is the sun; his beams are like the light which shone on Amnon's face as I saw him in my dreams. Would that to-day I might see him while awake!"

Maacah laughed.

"Seven-fold light beams upon thee, my mistress, while awake, but night visions are false and dreams senseless."

Thamar arose, dressed and put on her ornaments, and then went with Maacah up to the mountain of the House of the Lord, there to present themselves before the Lord of Hosts.

From every direction crowds were pressing towards the Holy Hill leading sheep and cattle for offerings. The two women crossed over the bridge which leads from Mt. Zion to Mt. Moriah, which Solomon built to connect his palace with God's Temple. When Thamar saw the multitude she sang and praised the Lord God, and said:

"Amnon, my chosen, is more to me than all these thousands. Oh! that I might find him among this throng! Yet why do I hope? Were he in Zion he would not delay in coming to my father's house, for he promised me, and he would not break his word."

As they went up the Hill of God, she knelt down and prayed:

"O God, thou who sendest help from thy Sanctuary, protect Amnon with thy rich grace. Grant that no harm may befall him where he tarries. He hath not kept his word, for he promised to come hither and assured me he would not forget. Still I am not angry with him, Oh Lord, because he certainly has not remained away from treachery or evil design. O thou Eternal One, who knowest his going out and coming in, his rising up and lying down, crown him with thy grace, and be to him a shield and fortress."

Thamar arose, walked about the Holy Hill with Maacah and then returned home.

After she had taken some refreshments, pomegranate wine and sweet pastry, she asked Thirza's permission to stroll through the city streets until noon. Thirza willingly granted it, with the caution not to remain away too long, and asked:

"What means it, my daughter, that the youth of Bethlehem has not arrived?"

Thamar answered:

"I know not what to think of it, for he appeared to me in no wise insincere when he made the promise."

Then with her maid she walked through the streets of Jerusalem. They examined everywhere thoroughly and searched in every corner, forgetting time and space until Maacah urged their return, as the shadow on King Ahaz's dial showed the hour of noon. Thamar sighed:

"Yes, let us go home, I have not yet found what I sought."

While she was thus vainly searching, Amnon had already arrived at Jerusalem. He asked for Jedidjah's house, found it and entered. Jedidjah met him and inquired:

"Who art thou, youth?"

"I am a shepherd," he answered, "belonging to thy steward, Abisai, and thy daughter urged me to come here when I came up to present myself before the Lord. I am here in obedience to her command."

Jedidjah looked upon him.

"Art thou called Amnon?"

"Yes, my lord, Amnon is the name of thy servant."

"Art thou he who rescued my daughter from the fierce lion?"

Amnon modestly said:

"God granted skill and power to the arms of thy servant to accomplish the deed."

"God, the Lord, give you favor among men, and mayest thou become a man of reputation in Zion. Thy deed remains with me. I shall reward thee according to thy merits." So saying Jedidjah presented him to his wife and his son Theman: "This is Amnon, the shepherd, who saved our Thamar."

Thirza rejoiced at meeting him and said:

"God bless thee, thou dear youth, who saved my daughter from such great peril; for had thy hand been weak, or thy step slow, my daughter's name would have been lost from the earth. Therefore we will keep a double Feast to-day, but thy deed shall not be unrewarded."

"I have had my reward, my deed was due alone to God, the Lord," was the youth's reverent reply.

Then Thirza said:

"Go, Amnon, take off thy shepherd's dress and attire thyself in the holyday garments which I made ready for thee yesterday, for from this time thou shalt belong in our house, and thou shalt no longer be called a shepherd." Then she ordered a bath to be prepared for him.

The servant brought him into the bath-room, and then, after having anointed him with sweet-smelling oil, led him radiant with beauty into the sitting-room, where Jedidjah said to him:

"Remain here for a little while until we return to seat ourselves at the table." He then left the room.

Then Theman, who had loved Amnon from their first meeting, took him into his sister's room.

"Thamar will soon return. She will scarcely know her rescuer, for the new garments have changed you greatly. They fit perfectly." Thus he spoke, and he rejoiced over him, and could not keep his eyes from him.

While they were talking together Thamar entered, leaning on her mother's arm and Maacah followed. When she spied Amnon in his new array, she blushed and her heart beat loudly for happiness, yet she sought to conceal her joy from the gaze of the lookers-on, and simply said:

"How happy I am to see the savor of my life under the shelter of my father's roof."

Amnon stood before her not knowing what to say, though his heart overflowed with joy. She continued:

"Now thou hast come to redeem thy word, and thy heart has proved itself faithful. Behold! thou hast done good unto those who forget not good deeds."

Thirza added:

"Much good is reserved for those who do good; therefore thou shalt no more wander on the steep places where the sheep feed, but shalt dwell among the nobles on the high places of mankind."

Theman, who was not weary of admiring Amnon's noble figure, whispered in his mother's ear:

"Look, he has the figure and appearance of the youth whom Hananel saw in dreams, not a single sign is wanting."

But his mother answered:

"Go away with thy tales."

Thamar desired to know what Theman had whispered to her mother, but Thirza told her, "It was foolishness." She could not however mistake the signs, yet she kept her observations to herself.

Thamar's room was ornamented with cedar, and painted in beautiful colors. Her windows opened on one side upon East street, and on the other upon a lovely garden where fragrant shrubs as nard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, and all sorts of sweet herbs grew. They sent their fragrance into the room and filled it with the perfume of myrrh, cloves, and all the choicest spices.

At this moment before the window which looked out upon East street, there appeared a man beating the air and shouting lustily. Theman went to the window to see what was going on. He saw there an old man tottering and staggering about. What was written on his face.

"What is thy name," inquired Theman, "and whither hast thou come? Perchance thou art a descendant of the giants, the dwellers at Kirjath-Arbah, now called Hebron, and hast drunken wine like one of them."

"From Hebron," was the answer.

"Ah! so! from Hebron," Theman laughingly replied. "Thou hast done well on the journey, for one who before times stayed at home. Thou hast drunken wine like a giant, yet thou art no traveler so it has overcome thee, and thy drunkenness hath brought thee to shame."

The wanderer still went on:

"Wine is good for troubled souls, yet I do not owe my intoxication to the children of Zion."

Curious to see him, Thirza now went to the window and spoke to the drunken man:

"Why standest thou in the street screaming and shouting? Come in, if thou hast anything to say."

"Do not pay attention to the fact that I am drunk and totter to and fro, for the light of my eyes is still with me, and in the shelter of thine house I see my benefactor. Behold, thy servant traveled from Hebron up to God's House in Zion. On the way I was attacked by robbers, who took away my sheep and cattle with all the gifts which they bore, for I wished to bring them, as God had

blessed me during the year. When I saw that I could not resist the robbers, I prayed only for my life and let them take all I carried, and wished them to the devil. As a swarm of locusts on a fertile field, so had these robbers eaten me bare, and left me like an empty vessel standing on the way. Now tell me, my lady, can a man go before the Lord with empty hands, or come to Jerusalem with an empty stomach?

"Yesterday I reached the gates of Zion. The city was filled with happy, exulting people, yet my stomach remained empty. Oh, this is a shame for Zion! Who can endure the unspeakable torture of hunger? I besought princes and noblemen to appease my hunger and cover my nakedness, yet no one regarded me, for they esteemed a man according to his apparel, and they desired proofs from me. What shall a hungry man give for proofs? Can he show them his empty stomach? I cried after each of them: 'May the Creator have no mercy on thee, as thou hast had no pity upon me,' and went angrily on my way. Then this youth, with his bright, beautiful eyes noticed me, and in a hand's turn my limbs and my stomach blessed him, for he gave me a garment for my nakedness, and bread, wine and meat for the holy-day.

"He had scarcely bestowed these gifts upon me ere he vanished from me, to my great regret. I reflected so much upon his good deed that I had no sleep the whole night. Then I resolved to go out early in the morning to seek for him in the streets and lanes, and to ask everybody for him. No sooner said than done. From early

morn I searched the whole city. When I went up to the Temple, lo! there I saw him and drew near to him; I was not mistaken, it was he. My soul overflowed with blessings and thankfulness towards him, but when I would have thanked him for all the favors which he had bestowed upon me, he pretended not to know me. Then I embraced him, but he mockingly laughed at me, saying: 'Depart from me, I am not he whom thou seekest.'

"His words perplexed me, still I never lost sight of him, but followed his footsteps until he entered thy house. Now judge, my lady, between this youth and me, for I will not leave here until he has received my benediction."

Thirza looked approvingly at Amnon, and said:

"Come here, thou kind-hearted youth, and receive this man's blessing," but Amnon went to the window and said:

"Thou strange man! How long wilt thou be drunk? Let the wine go from thee, for thou art altogether mistaken in him who has received thy thanks."

The man replied:

"I swear to thee that thou didst bestow the kindness upon me."

"The man is right," said Thirza, Theman and Thamar in one breath. Amnon stood perplexed and told the stranger:

"Come to me to-morrow morning. I dwell by the fish-gate, in the house of Imna the Carmelite."

The man replied:

"Thy wish is sacred to me, but I swear to thee by the God who dwelleth in Zion, that in the same measure with which thou hast sought to conceal thy kindness, I will disclose it, and I will proclaim thy goodness in the gates. If this be a shame to thee, may God bless all the princes of Judea with such children, then would David's city never be moved."

The man then turned to go away.

Thirza and Thamar were surprised at hearing of Amnon's benevolence, which displayed his kind disposition. Theman embraced him and said:

"Thy deed appears wonderful to me, Amnon. My soul loves thee, and I shall regard thee as a brother."

While they were thus conversing, Azrikam entered and the drunkard, who had reached the next corner, came back to the window shouting:

"That is the prince's son who, when I asked him for alms yesterday, scorned me; rebuked me with hard words, mercilessly thrust me aside and would not assist me, although he is of high position. Verily such a hard-hearted fellow as he should not be allowed to enter the house of the 'Benefactor.'"

Azrikam loudly exclaimed:

"Who called such rabble to Jerusalem? Do we suffer for lack of drunkards? Go quickly away or I will deliver thee to the keepers of the peace, who will drive away thy drunkenness with rods, and teach thee how to speak to a prince in Judea."

But the drunkard cried yet louder:

"Aye, rods are prepared for the hard-hearted and they that wander from virtue; for our princes who load themselves with fat and fill their stomachs with good things, and are without human hearts."

Amnon stepped to the window.

"The foolishness of wine," he said, "speaks through thy lips, therefore, cease thy insolence and no longer abuse a prince."

The drunkard immediately responded:

"Verily thou hast a spirit of good will, wherefore chastise this prince's son with the rods of thy mouth, for he little resembles a prince in Judea, but is much like the great horned ox of Bashan."

However, when the drunkard, after these insulting words, saw that Azrikam was about to seize him, he mingled quickly with the people in the street and was soon lost in the crowd.

Theman, in a low tone, said to Amnon:

"Know thou, this youth is Azrikam, to whom my sister is betrothed. I trust he will reward thee well for the service thou hast rendered his bride."

Azrikam had already jealously noticed Theman's friendliness towards Amnon, and also the affectionate looks which Thamar bestowed upon him, and he said to Thirza:

"Who is this youth, and what is his city?"

Thirza answered:

"He is Amnon, the shepherd, who rescued thy beloved from the lions."

"So this is Amnon, the shepherd," replied

Azrikam, speaking the last word very emphatically.

"He was formerly a shepherd, and kept the sheep of Joram, thy father," answered Thirza. "I rejoice," said Azrikam, "in the strength of his arm. Under his oversight my sheep are being well guarded; be assured, therefore, I will employ him, nor will I forget the service which he has rendered Thamar, but will make him an upper shepherd. But what seems remarkable to me is that he, a shepherd, is clothed like a nobleman. Has the pasturage of the shepherds become a weariness since he displayed his courage and presence of mind?"

Thamar then said:

"A man cannot alter his character and disposition, but every morning he can dress according to the place he occupies."

"Thou art right," replied Azrikam. "Since yesterday thou hast not changed thy evil disposition for a better. I asked thee why shepherds wear noblemen's clothing, and thou hast answered with something entirely different."

Thirza interrupted him, saying:

"Although Amnon is not a nobleman's son, yet God hath blessed him with very remarkable gifts far surpassing the usual measure of birth and descent, for the spirit of bravery and courage rests upon him. Thou oughtest, for the love which thou barest to Thamar, to be willing to esteem this youth who saved her life."

Azrikam turned and addressed Amnon:

"Abisai sent thee to Bozrah to buy sheep.

Now are the sheep which thou hast brought with thee from thence fat or lean?"

Amnon answered:

"They are very good, my lord, but we will not now talk of business, for to-day is a holy-day."

Azrikam replied:

"God will not reckon it against us as a sin if we take an offering to Him from the herd. But be thou, brave youth, a perfect man, and be not ashamed of thy labor, but perform it as a faithful servant. Even if thou art of humble origin, yet thou canst rejoice over the strength of thine arm and thy courage."

Thamar added:

"God looks upon the heart, still there are many short-sighted people who see only what their eyes behold. We inquire of every man: Who are his parents, how great is his wealth, and what is his business? And thereupon we estimate his worth."

Azrikam again spoke:

"I am also only a short-sighted man, and not God. Nevertheless, before thou openedst thy mouth, I had searched thine heart and found it was not upright. I perceived that thou soughtest to quarrel with me. Did I not say yesterday that another spirit rules thee, and I know not whence it came?"

When Thirza saw that hot words had begun to fall, she said:

"Ye men, go now into the booth and refresh yourselves with old wine, until my husband comes and we partake of the noon-day meal."

"I will eat nothing," said Azrikam, "until the priest has notified me that the fifty whole-offerings which I have brought to-day are wholly consumed, for how can a man care for his body before his offering has appeased God?"

Thereupon Theman inquired:

"Behold thou hast manifold whole-offerings wherewith to enrich God's altar, why didst thou not bring a peace-offering for distribution among the priests and the poor?"

"Oh!" said Thamar, "who shall concern themselves for the poor and despised that lie in the dust? He who does not work should not eat. Is it not better to give them seven strokes for their laziness, and thereby strengthen their arms so that they shall no more knock at our doors?"

"What art thou saying, my daughter?" asked Thirza in surprise. Amnon and Theman also wondered at her words.

Thamar answered:

"I swear by my life that these words came not from my heart, for this good teaching I learned yesterday from one of high position, who condescended to speak thus of the needy common people," and she fixed her eyes upon Azrikam, who blushed with shame before her words and looks.

While they stood gazing at each other in silence, a boy came running to tell Azrikam that confusion had arisen in his house, and on that account Achan, the steward, had sent him to call his master. Azrikam now hastened home, but Thirza detained the boy to question him. She

gave him some refreshments, and urged him to tell what had happened at Azrikam's house.

The boy, after looking carefully around to see if any one were listening, said:

"Here first have I observed that to-day is a holy-day, for in my master's house there is nothing to show it. Holy-day rejoicing is forbidden. Nothing but a piece of dry bread has passed my lips to-day. Behold! my master's servants wait impatiently for the day when thy daughter shall enter our house, for we all hope she will abolish these evil conditions."

But Thamar whispered in Theman's ear:

"That day will never dawn!"

Thirza urged him to tell her what was the unusual event which had recalled Azrikam home so suddenly. Then he told her:

"Thou knowest, my lady, that in Joram's time it was the custom of the house on every holy-day, to set a table for four hundred converted Gentiles, widows and orphans. Since Azrikam has grown up, he has abolished this custom, and accordingly ordered his steward before the holy-day began to distribute a very little from cellars and threshing-floor to the poor. But Achan, the villain, closed his hand and gave nothing. Yesterday when the poor came to receive the customary alms, he said to them: 'Come again at evening, then my master will open his granary.' But my master did not come home last evening. This morning, two men came before my master's house, called Achan out, and said: 'Whereas thy master has despised the wish of the poor, and thou also hast refrained thine hand from the

thirsty, so in the future a day will come when the houses of Azrikam and Achan will be cast off as an olive-tree sheds its dry leaves, and they will be spit out as trash.' After this speech a crowd of threatening figures surrounded my master's house, and called down terrible curses upon his dwelling. He can thank Achan for all this, for he is an arch villain whom he has placed over his house to cause the poor and the servants to suffer hunger."

When he had ended Thirza admonished him, saying:

"Disclose not the shame of thy master's house in the gates."

The boy answered:

"Such be far from me."

While they were talking Azrikam returned. When he saw the boy, he gnashed his teeth and looked so angry that the boy was afraid and ran quickly home. Azrikam turned to those present, and said:

"God hath blessed me with great riches, still he hath given me careless fellows, fools, and drunkards as servants. From the steward down to the youngest boy they all drink. Since the day of my majority, I have given the distribution of alms to my majority, I have given the distribution of alms to my steward, Achan; could I then have foreseen that he, as yesterday, would drink too much wine, and therefore forget my command and let the poor go empty away? Now this curse has befallen me. Therefore, the servants of my house shall no longer be furnished with oil and wine. They shall be Nazarites, and fast to-day and always."

Thamar mockingly answered him:

"Thirty days do the Nazarites fast, but I believe that in thy household the fast days are not only thirty, but three times thirty, and that they never cease."

Azrikam cast an angry glance at Thamar but did not answer her remark, because just then Jedidjah, with Sithri from Carmel, and thirty sons of the prophets entered.

When Sithri perceived Amnon, he went to him, and said:

"Peace be with thee, thou lovely youth, my brother Abisai's pupil!"

Amnon answered:

"Peace be with thee, my lord!"

"Why has not Abisai been invited to eat with me?" inquired Jedidjah.

One of the lads answered:

"He will soon come," and at the same moment Theman, who was standing at the window, cried out that he saw him coming. Presently Abisai entered, and Jedidjah turned to him with the question:

"What shall be done for the youth who has saved my daughter's life?"

"I know his character," replied Abisai, "and that songs and proverbs flow from him like gold and wealth, for he utters sincere and elevating words, and sings songs to the praise of Zion in the shepherd's pastures."

Jedidjah turned to Amnon and said:

"Tell me thy wish. I am ready to grant it to thee."

Amnon answered:

"If I have found grace in thy sight, grant me a place among these," pointing to the sons of the prophets.

"Henceforth, thou shalt abide with me," said Jedidjah, "and shalt dwell in my house, and eat at my table." Then addressing the sons of the prophets, he continued, "If ye value my good will, take this lad lovingly among you and protect him with the hand of righteousness. Apply your mind to him, because he understands prov-erbs, parables and all God's wisdom."

The sons of the prophets, with one voice replied:

"If the youth wishes to come with us, and will endeavor to know God, then peace and virtue shall attend his ways, and he will become famous in the gates of Zion."

"The table is set outside in the booth which is in the garden," Jedidjah said, "so let us go thither to satisfy ourselves with God's gifts, and delight in instructive and agreeable conversation."



CHAPTER VII

THE FEAST OF THE ELECT

JEDIDJAH'S booth stood in a beautiful garden, under tall, shady trees whose branches met overhead. Circular flower beds surrounded it, in which grew flowers and various kinds of fragrant herbs. It was covered with palm branches. Here Jedidjah, with his family and his guests, sat at the table. They ate and drank and were of good cheer.

Thamar gazed from the open window of her room into the garden. She was clad in costly purple raiment. Dignity sat enthroned on her white brow, while graciousness was reflected from her smooth, rosy cheeks. Her eyes shone like the morning light. Her gaze fastened itself upon Amnon, unto whom her heart clave, and turned from Azrikam, the hated of her soul, who sat at Jedidjah's right hand; Theman sat next and then came Abisai, Sithri, and the sons of the prophets.

Jedidjah began the conversation:

"We sit here so pleasantly together in this peaceful dwelling and safe resting-place. May God ever keep us under the shelter of his grace, then shall we abide safely under the shadow of our own fig-tree, and shall not fear Sennacherib,

the King of Assyria, who has stretched out his hand to destroy kingdoms."

One of the sons of the prophets now spoke:
 "If within us we keep the kingdom of peace and cherish the truth, we shall be safe from Sennacherib's power; but one feels sad to know that Sebna, the chamberlain, is in league with the enemy and is making a secret treaty with him, thus destroying the unity of God's City. He divides the people's heart, saying: 'We have no help from God, nor support from his anointed.' Behold, the Lord will reject him as a mightier one was rejected, and shall cover him up and roll him out of the land like a ball. As he has destroyed peace, peace shall desert his soul, as the Lord has spoken through Isaiah, his servant."

Here Sithri interrupted him:

"Why should we fear evil days? Has not the Lord promised peace to His people, and all godly men? Let us then rather join in a song of peace."

Jedidjah quickly assented:

"Amnon must sing us a song of Zion, for Abisai maintains that his singing is charming."

But Amnon said:

"I am too insignificant to open my mouth before the great ones of Zion, yet how can I, my lord, refuse any request of thine while I abide under the shadow of thy roof? So I will sing in praise of peace—

O God of Zion, peace above us spread!
 Let thine hand cover our defenceless head
 As when Thou savedst us from Mizraim.

Almighty One, reveal thy great salvation,
 And show thy mercy to thy chosen nation,
 From thy dread temple in Jerusalem.

When Thou didst frown on Ashur, Bel fell down;
 When Thou didst smile on Zion for thine own,
 Then were rejoicings made in hill and dell.
 The throne of God is peace in heaven above;
 Messiah's throne on earth is peace and love,
 And peace shall be our lodge where we shall dwell.

O God of Zion! peace above us spread;
 El Shaddai! cover our defenceless head;
 Lead us,—protect us by thy mighty hand.
 Make peace to blossom like the olive tree;
 From enemies and troubles set us free,
 And bless with constant peace our holy land.

The sons of the prophets, who perceived the sweetness of this song, were surprised at him and talked it over among themselves. One said:

"He would distinguish himself among the orators."

Another exclaimed:

"Oh! if he were of the house of Levi! he could let his sweet voice be heard in the house of the Lord."

Jedidjah exclaimed:

"Would he were a prince in Judea!"

But Thamar sighed softly:

"O that he were the prince of my youth!"
 She whispered this in the ear of her maid, Maacah, while her eyes rested on his noble figure.

Azrikam noticed that Thamar had not withdrawn her gaze from Amnon during the repast, and was fired with jealousy. But he concealed

the hostile purpose which he had formed against the shepherd, and said:

"Yes, such fine singers and orators are born in Zion every morning, but no one considers them remarkable because they dwell in the city of the king among nobles, upon whom the favor of God shines; in a city whose princes and nobles, whose priests and prophets, year in and year out, speak in sublime language. Still, the peasant and the shepherd, who all day long hear only the bleating of their flocks and watch over the wanderings of their beasts, know little of godly matters and their speech is rough. Wherefore, we must say of this youth, 'Behold! this is unusual.'"

Thereupon Sithri began:

"It well becomes a townsman to praise his home, and all that is therein, yet I, a dweller in the woods of Carmel, will now allow the shepherds and country-folks the right of argument. But, pardon me, my lords and companions, if I speak further. Azrikam has, while thus asserting that the country people know but little of the things of God, spoken words like threatening blows. Thereupon, I answer him. Honor and splendor certainly dwell in lordly temples and fine palaces. The knowledge of God rests in the dwellings of the upright, and the majesty of the Lord in His Sanctuary; yet true fear of God is found even in the villages, though far distant from the House of God, for God is near to the hearts and the mouths of the country people, and His righteousness is shown in the changing sea-

sons of the year—seed-time and harvest-time, in need and in plenty. When the heavens withhold rain and dew, then the husbandmen lift up their eyes and hope for the gracious and blessed showers, which the Lord will send to refresh the parched land. When heaven opens its gates and pours down its golden rain upon the earth, then the Lord blesses the land and it is a fruitful year. Then the hills overflow with honey, and the valleys drip fatness. Then, from far and near a song of praise and thanksgiving resounds, and harvest joy and autumn rejoicing fill all hearts. They gather their corn, and their wine. They satisfy themselves with the gifts of God and what remains over is for the poor.

"Go forth into the hamlets and villages and observe their inhabitants. They rise early, while yet the quiet night rests upon the earth. When the mist, which during the night has collected on the hills and mountains disappears, then the men go forth to their labors, while the virtuous women prepare flax and wool and provide clothing for all the household. When the sun gradually rises over the mountains, and the birds rejoice and sing, then the countryman turns his heart to the Almighty, for God is his rejoicing and his prayer ascends as sweet-smelling incense. Afterwards he returns, and when he enters his humble cottage, his faithful wife meets him with a smile while her eyes beam with love and graciousness. They awaken the children, they sit together, delighting themselves with God's gifts. They remain happily together until the sun is high in the heaven.

“At this time of the day, the son of Zion still lies outstretched on his couch turning and yawning. He has hardly put his feet out of bed before he begins to fret and scold. His slave tremblingly hastens to him, smears him with soap, washes him, anoints him with costly oil, and dresses him like an idol who has no hands wherewith to help himself. The slave brings him his under and upper garments, girdle and headcloth. He looks disdainfully upon them for he despises his people's attire, and would fain clothe himself in Egyptian linen which has been prepared on the banks of the Nile. Whoever is ashamed of the fashions of his people, his heart cleaves not to his fatherland. Oh! if I were a prince and judge in Judea I would forbid and put away the traffic of the Egyptians, Phoenicians and all our neighboring countries from our borders, for it renders our customs effeminate, and estranges us from our birthplace. Are there no weavers and embroiderers in Judea that we are forced to go to a strange land for material and clothing wherewith to cover our nakedness? Do not our sheep produce wool enough to keep our bodies warm?

“When the little lord is dressed, he strolls through the city; he goes from the Inner Gate to the Benjamin Gate, and from there to the Water Gate. If he falls in with some young people, they hasten to a wine shop where they drink until silly. Oh! go not into the noisy streets, for therein envy dwells,—envy, which seeks to set one man against another; there no one can protect himself against the sharp tongue of him who notices his neighbor's faults and slanders the vir-

tues and talents which he himself does not possess. There, the betrayer kisses with the mouth and bites with the teeth; there, revenge burns like hell and watches for blood wherewith to quench its fires.

“Love, too, which is so sweet and tender among the villagers, travels on evil ways in the cities. Do not riches and reputation often form an insurmountable barrier between two hearts which were created for each other? I have seen how grandeur and distinction have sold your lovely daughters to fellows who have naught save wealth and noble birth. Such unhappy women climb the mountains at night to utter their complaints to the moon. They wither like the roses in the winter's frost, for they have become the prey of those whom they detest. The city knows no rest, nor does the night bring sleep.

“Far different is the lot of the country people; luxury and weakness are unknown to them, evil and slanders are strangers there, and no maiden will exchange her inclinations for glory and reputation or her heart's desire for wealth and possessions. Therefore, she blooms in her youth and is green in her old age, and praises God on the heritage of her fathers, that she has not been bartered away. Ask the fortunate ones: ‘Where is the road to Gilead?’ They do not know. For who has all the plagues, infirmities and diseases? Those who dwell in cities. A breeze blows them over, and a little word makes them unhappy for a lifetime. Every joy flees before their pride, and envy, like a worm, gnaws them in the marketplace. If ye would but consider these facts, my

lords and masters, ye would leave the city to dwell in the country."

Jedidjah here interrupted Sithri:

"Save thy words for a fast-day, then thou mayest preach in the gates; to-day is a holiday, so let us drink and be merry!"

He presented his guests with wine, and then continued:

"Drain the cups, all of you, for the Lord has richly poured out his blessings upon city and country."

Then the cups went round—once, twice, thrice.

Azrikam drank to quench his rage, for he was sick at heart over the events of the day, and his pride had been deeply wounded; but Jedidjah turned to him, saying:

"I have heard that thy steward, Achan, refused to bestow the customary gifts upon the poor."

"I have already to-day reproved him for this fault," he replied, "and now I will send a servant with the order to keep his hand open for all the poor."

"Therefore, I praise thee, my son," replied Jedidjah, "walk in the paths of virtue and mildness, as did Joram, thy father."

Azrikam now sent the servant that he might receive the title of benefactor, but in his heart he begrudged the alms.

The sons of the prophets then gave Amnon a friendly shake of the hand, and as evening had now come on, they blessed Jedidjah and his

family and took their leave. Amnon wished to depart with them, but Jedidjah detained him.

Azrikam wanted Theman and Thamar to spend the evening with him, but Thamar was unwilling to go. Theman, however, after being urged went, and Zimri joined them. Before going, Theman said to his father:

"Oh! that Amnon might ever remain with us!"

Upon this, Jedidjah said to Amnon:

"I have had a room in the upper story whose windows look out upon the gardens prepared for thee, and I will care for all thy needs. Now conduct thyself bravely and faithfully."

Then he took him by the hand and led him out before the eyes of Abisai, Sithri, Azrikam and Theman. When they reached the room, Jedidjah said:

"See, here thou hast a bed, a table, a chair, and a candle. I have also put a harp and a lute herein, for I have heard that thou understandest them like a master."

Amnon said:

"My lord, how do I merit so much favor?" and he thanked Jedidjah, who went his way.

Wrapt in deep thought Amnon remained alone in his new abode. From every corner of the jubilant city the noise of the multitude reached his ears. Happy songs resounded from all the heights and streets of Zion. Young men and maidens joined in the dance, and even the old people tripped behind, gazing with delight at the young people's enjoyment. All rejoiced in the protection of the Almighty, and in their wise and

good king. At this high Feast of Peace, Mt. Zion was lighted with oil-lamps, numerous as the stars of heaven, while the Tower of David and the other towers shone like gleaming sapphires.

The moon poured the silvery light over the whole city. Amnon leaned from his window and could not gaze enough at the glory spread before his eyes. Then he perceived Thamar, who with her maid Maacah was strolling through the gardens. She also saw him, and as she wished to be free from Maacah's presence, she sent her into the house with the order to prepare a dish of cool, sweet pomegranates. When she found herself alone, she went under Amnon's window and spoke to him:

"Dear youth! a mighty one has known thee in a vision. Behold! a young man with thy figure and countenance appeared to Hananel, my grandfather, in a vision. The prophecy declared he should become great and important in our house, and should hold his head high. If thou shalt be able to fulfil this, thou wilt become strong and mighty, for much good is foretold of thee. Therefore, tell me thy origin that I may be certain."

Amnon's eyes moistened as he heard these words.

"Deceive not thyself with dreams," he replied, "thou noblest of women, for how canst thou believe that I shall ever hold my head high. I am poor, and low-born, and my origin is unknown even to Abisai, who bought me from a strange man when I was a child."

Thamar answered:

"Trouble not thyself over that, my friend, for the eyes of men behold in thee so much kindness, beauty, courage, and bravery, who among Zion's daughters will not desire to win thy love?"

Amnon asked with a sigh:

"Will any maiden in Zion exchange beauty for riches, or courage for high birth and origin?"

"Who knows!" answered Thamar, "perhaps, already there is a maiden in the city who values your love more than her life, and will not consider thine origin."

They could continue the conversation no longer, for Maacah returned to the garden and summoned Thamar to go to her mother who was waiting to go with her for a walk through the streets of the city. They requested Amnon's company, and then they sought together the place where the happy tribes held sway. Thamar's hope was strengthened upon learning that Amnon's origin was unknown, for Hananel's dream had foretold: "His descent is unknown, but in the course of time it will be revealed."

Upon reaching his house Azrikam asked Achan if he had distributed the alms among the poor.

"Certainly, my lord!" he answered. "I opened my hand wide as thou commandedst, and distributed rye and wine in abundance."

This made Azrikam very angry, but he concealed his feelings until Theman and Zimri had gone. His anger was fiercest against the servant who had brought him into bad odor with Jedid-

jah, and he struck him fearful blows. He said to Achan:

"From this day henceforth thou shalt know that when I say to thee, 'Give this man freely,' thou shalt not do it, acting according to my intentions. Judge not after the mildness of my mouth, but after the hardness of my heart."

"Why wilt thou," said Achan, "make me the target for the curses of the poor? Thou removest the curse of the poor from thyself that they may fall on me."

"Thou miserable slave, how dost thou dare to speak such words to me!" cried Azrikam, "shouldest thou not fear thy master's anger more than the curses of these ragged fellows? What I have once decided, I will not alter. Therefore, fulfill all my commands and let not the slightest word which I have said to thee be made known to others; moreover, tremble lest I lift up my hand against thee! Joram, my father, through his kind-heartedness, indulged thee in thy youth, but my hand shall be heavy upon thee in thine old age."

Achan, fearing his master's anger, did as Azrikam commanded, and his name was cursed.

Theman and Zimri returned home. The lights in the palaces and cottages were gradually extinguished, the shouting of the merry-makers ceased, the noisy streets became quiet; soon all was still throughout the city. Here and there a straggler could be seen, and from time to time the voices of the watchmen could be heard calling to each other:

"Praised be the Lord of Zion, who dwelleth at Jerusalem, Hallelujah!"

Amnon had sought his bed, but he could not sleep for his soul was full of the glory of Zion and of Thamar's wonderful words, over which his heart despaired. He thought:

"Thamar is removed from me as far as the heavens from the earth. When her father perceives my love for her, he will consider me a stumbling-stone and will send me forth with shame and disgrace."

When he thought of Azrikam he began to tremble and shudder, and he said to himself:

"O Thamar! thou who art so pure and yet so fearful! Mountains tower about thee, and I fear to ascend them."

Filled with such thoughts he tossed upon his bed for the whole night, and when the God-fearing awoke early to pray, his eyes had found no sleep. Thamar also was sleepless, so in the last hour of the night-watch she awoke Maacah, and they went into the garden. When they passed Amnon's window a light was burning in his room, and, behold, they heard the sound of a harp and Amnon's voice as he sang the following:

Peace dwells alone within the shepherd's tent,
Alas! why didst thou leave that blest abode?

Woe to the exultant fool on greatness bent!
He soon bows down beneath his heavy load.

O Thamar, lofty one, my love for thee
Is wonderful! Nor Amnon dost thou scorn.
To the chief corner thou exaltest me.
A common stone. Yet woe! I am low-born!

O thou, my heart's desire, avert thy glance
From Amnon lowly born and love-beguiled!
And on some prince lift up thy countenance:—
Thou art high-born—a prince of Judah's child.

Peace dwells alone within the shepherd's tent.

Why dost thou longer chase the wind unblest?
Leave Zion and her fools on greatness bent:—
To Bethlehem return—there is thy rest.

Maacah had fixed her eyes upon Amnon since the first time she saw him at Bethlehem, but fearing her mistress's jealousy, she concealed her love in her heart. Therefore, when she heard the last words of Amnon's song, she said to her mistress:

"See now, how unhappy Amnon is since he has left the shepherd's pastures to dwell among the nobles and share their disquiet. He looks sorrowfully in thy face, and lifts his eyes hopelessly to thee. Thou knowest not how to reply to him, for thou knowest thou canst not return his love without shame to thy parents and thyself."

Maacah said it deceitfully, for she intended, if Amnon went away, to follow him and marry him.

Tamar answered:

"My heart tells me that Amnon has come here to become great. All who see him love him. This is a sign that the Lord is with him, and besides, who knows what the future will bring forth."

CHAPTER VIII

THE JEALOUSY OF AZRIKAM



HEPHER and Bukjah had gradually sunk deeper and deeper in want and poverty, for God's curse had rested upon all their deeds ever since they committed the terrible crime in Joram's house. When they began to want for bread to put on their table, they went to Mattan, the unjust judge, and besought him to assist them in their need, because they had been ready to be his tools when he contrived the plot against Hagith, whom he hated, to secure Joram's treasure for him, and to bear false witness against Naomi.

"Naught remains to me of Joram's treasures," Mattan answered, "save care and sorrow. Why should I reward you now for your sin, when I repent that I ever originated it? Still, I will see what can be done for you: therefore, be patient for a little while."

One day Mattan repaired to Azrikam, and said to him:

"Thou sittest quietly, without anxiety in thine house, and knowest not that danger threatens thee. Behold! Chepher and Bukjah have been to me and spoken thus: 'We confess ourselves guilty concerning Naomi, against whom we bore false witness. Now, we are determined to go before the elders and tell them all, and they