

ALL THE WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

CHAPTER I

Women of the Dawn

EVE

God creates her from rib of Adam. She is tempted by serpent. Cain is born, then Abel. Cain kills Abel. Seth is born, also other children. She is mentioned twice in New Testament.

Gen. 3:20; 4:1 II COR. II:3 I TIM. 2:13

"IN HIS OWN IMAGE"

THE story of the first woman begins with Eve in the Garden of Eden, where she first discovered that she bore a unique relationship to God, the supreme power in the universe. The great reality is not that she came from the rib of Adam but that God created her and brought her womanly nature into being.

The divine purpose relative to woman is found in the first part of the first story of the Creation: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27). Here we have warranty for woman's dominion. ? The fact that God did not give dominion until he had woman standing beside him is evidence enough of her exalted place in the Creation.

Various theories regarding the origin of Genesis and of the story concerning Eve, the first woman, have been evolved. Some scholars believe that parts of Genesis are based on myths and fables. Others call it a "legend wrapped around fundamental spiritual truths."

All Bible scholars concede that the story of Creation was conceived by an ancient people, to whom great truths about the spiritual universe in which they lived were becoming known. How these truths became known and why, scholars cannot answer. Nor do they try to answer all the questions concerning the creation of the first woman. The significant fact is that this first woman was set in a pattern of sublime religious truths.

The magnificent theme of the story is that God, seeing the incompleteness of man standing alone, wanted to find a helper for him. Not having found this helper in all created things, such as the birds of the air or the beasts of the field, God was obliged to make for man a helper who was his equal and who shared in the same processes of creation in which he shared. And so God created this helper Eve, whose name means "life," not from the animal kingdom, but from the rib of Adam himself.

The symbolism of the rib is that it was taken from the place nearest to Adam's heart, thus indicating the close relationship of man and woman. The real essence of the story is that man and woman were made for each other, that woman is bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh; therefore they are not all that God intended them to be until they are together.

The oneness of man and women in true marriage comes into its fullest meaning in Genesis 2:24: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother and shall cleave unto his wife: an they shall be one flesh." Marriage emerges, not as a civil contract, but as a divine institution. n this union of Adam and Eve all marriages become coeval with Creation, fully demonstrating that the laws of morals and the laws of nature are coincident.

Eve herself, like all of us, came into a universe that was immeasurable and orderly, and her creation takes on the same wonder as that of the stars, the sun, the moon, and all other things which God created and called good.

In the Genesis account Eve is elevated to ethereal beauty and lofty dignity. As a great sculptor might strike a beautiful figure out of Parian marble, Eve arises from the rib of Adam beautiful of form and figure and with Paradise as her birthplace. Milton, in his *Paradise Lost*, has called her Queen of the Universe and Fairest of the Fair. By poet and artist alike she has usually been pictured with gleaming golden hair, with a face celestial in loveliness and a form strong and immortal.

All of the great epochs in a woman's life, her marriage, mating, and motherhood, unfold in all of their completeness in the Genesis account of Eve. The family, too, with all its joys and heartaches comes into being, with Eve as the center of it. In Eve all the elemental questions of life, birth, and death, even sin and temptation, are shown in their human dimension.

When Eve listened to the serpent, representing temptation, she followed, not the will of God, but the path of evil. When she ate the fruit from the Forbidden Tree, she acted independently of God, in whose image she had been created. From God, who watched over her truest interests, she turned to a serpent, which distorted the truth regarding the fruit God had forbidden. The serpent beguiled Eve by telling her that if she would eat of the forbidden fruit she would gain for herself new delights.

After she had partaken of the forbidden fruit, she also gave it to Adam, and he too ate it, thus sharing in her guilt. In this act we have an excellent example of woman's impulsiveness and man's inclination to follow woman wherever she leads, even into sin. Eve with Adam "hid from the presence of God" for they knew they had done wrong. Afterward, when Eve told God that "the serpent beguiled me, and id eat," she displayed the natural tendency of 7 woman to blame, not herself or her wrongdoings, but those around her.

Though Eve fell far short of the ideal in womanhood, she rose to the dream of her destiny as a wife and mother. Paradise had been lost. She knew that, but something wonderful, maternal care, had been born. In Eve, motherhood became a great sacrifice and a sublime service. The winged creatures and the animals of the Garden of Eden achieved their motherhood lightly, but for Eve, though motherhood often was achieved at the price of anguish, it became her sacred responsibility.

In the birth of her first son Cain and her second son Abel. Eve experienced all the pains of childbirth, never forgetting perhaps what God had said when she ate of the forbidden fruit, "I will multiply your pain in childbirth."

When her first son was born, we know that Eve, like all mothers, also experienced great joy. The whole world had been re-created, and she could exclaim, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." Here are the sublimest words from the lips of Eve, who named her first son Cain, meaning "gotten" or "acquired." Eve realized that her child came not merely from her flesh but from God himself. Her positive assertion of this makes us certain that God, and not the serpent, now ruled over her life.

Later Eve gave birth to a second son, Abel, meaning "breath" or "fading away." The first mother saw her sons grow to be as different in nature as in interests. Early she discerned signs of jealousy between them. Finally Cain, her first son and most beloved, killed his brother Abel. Though the

story does not furnish details, we can picture this first mother as experiencing all the anxieties, heartaches, and torments suffered by other mothers of wicked sons down the centuries of time.

Yet Eve knew that God was still in this universe which He had created. In a few years she was to see the fulfillment of His plan in her own life. Cain married and Eve had a grandchild, Enoch, as well as other heirs. A long interval elapsed. am, we are told, was 130 years old when Eve, who could not have been much younger, gave birth to Seth, his name meaning "to appoint" or "to establish." And she took new courage in the fact, we know, for she said, "God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew." A great seed this was to be for the ancestry of Jesus Christ was to be traced back to the line of Seth.

Other sons and daughters were born to Adam of Eve, though the other children's names are not listed. But after her time for childbearing passed, Eve's story merged into that of her children. She lived on in Seth, the strongest of her children, and in the great line of Seth's descendants, who called "upon the name of the Lord."

Twice in the New Testament, both times in the Pauline writings, Eve is mentioned. Paul reminds the Corinthians that they, like Eve, are in danger of being led away from the simplicity of Christ's teaching and can be hurt by the "subtlety of the serpent," which brings disunity (II Cor. 11:3). Paul expresses his position in regard to woman in a letter to his assistant Timothy. He argues that man is superior, "For Adam was first formed, then Eve." Though he recognizes that "woman being deceived was in the transgression," he declares she can be saved in childbearing, if she continues "in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety" (I Tim. 2:13-15).

But let us turn back to the Genesis account where we have the scriptural record that male and female were created in His own image. Despite her later transgressions, Eve still stands forth as a revelation of the Father, and as one who can rise above her transgressions.

SARAH

Wife of Abraham. Goes with him from Ur to Haran and thence to land of Canaan. Sarah is "fair to look upon." God promises to bless her as Mother of Nations. Impatient of divine delays, she gives her maid, Hagar, to husband. Ishmael is born. Finally Sarah gives birth to Isaac. She dies and is buried at Machpelah. Appears among worthies in New Testament.

GEN. 11:29, 30, 31 12:5, 11, 17 16:1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 17:15,17,19,21; 18:6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 20:2, 14, 16, 18; 21:1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 9 12 23:1, 2, 19; 24:36, 67 25:10, 12 49:31; ISA. 51:2 ROM- 4:19 9:9 HIB. 11:11; I PIT. 3:6

"MOTHER OF NATIONS" [SARAH]

THE first woman distinctly portrayed in the dramatic history of man's spiritual development is Sarah, beloved wife of Abraham, founder of the House of Israel. The story of the beautiful and distinguished Sarah and her husband, "Father of Faithful," covers more space in the Genesis account than does that of the entire human race from the Creation down to their time.

Sarah's life was one continuous trial of her faith in God's promise that she was to be the Mother of Nations. Through this trial she emerged as a woman of power, one who was a dutiful and beloved wife and who finally became a favored and venerated mother.

In Sarah's period, which was probably sometime in the nineteenth or twentieth century B.C., woman assumed little importance until she had given her husband a son, for it was through his son that a man lived on. The tragedy of Sarah's early life was that she was barren, but the miracle of her life was that she gave birth to Isaac, Son of Promise, when, humanly speaking, the time had passed when she could become a mother.

The miracle was achieved through the faith of Abraham and the loyalty of Sarah to her husband. While they still resided at Haran, God said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation" (Gen. 12:1, 2).

Sarah's life became Abraham's. Where he went she went, not as his shadow but as a strong influence. Together they experienced the vicissitudes of nomadic life and found in them great spiritual significance. Abraham, man of God, was willing to forsake home and country for the unknown, with Sarah ever at his side. Her love and loyalty were blessed by Abraham's devotion to her.

Departure from their native land, the only land either of them had ever known, did not divide them in love or purpose. Dangerous were the wastelands and towns through which they traveled, but Sarah never looked back, as Lot's wife did later when she left Sodom. Tenaciously Sarah shared her husband's dangers and heartaches and also his great purposes and dreams.

Early in their wanderings, under the spreading tree of Moreh, in the rich valley of Shechem, Abraham built an altar to the Lord. Later he built an altar near Beth-el, twelve miles north of Jerusalem, and another under an oak at Mamre. It is easy to imagine that Sarah worshiped at these altars with her husband. Though less credulous than he, she had a high conception of wifely duty, for Sarah was obedient, to Abraham. She became what Peter calls an "heir" with Abraham of "the grace of life" (I Pet. 3:7).

The adversity of famine that swept them later into the Valley of the Nile did not divide them, nor did great prosperity, which followed Abraham through most of the days of his long life. The intensity of their union deepened and became like a mighty force that nothing, not even Hagar, a secondary wife and mother of Abraham's first child, Ishmael, could diminish.

When Sarah and her husband started their wanderings, they both were in their mature years. The Bible says she was sixty-five and he was seventy-five. They had known only one home, Ur, about halfway between the head of the Persian Gulf and Bagdad. From this ancient city of reed and mud huts Sarah traveled with her husband along the level banks of the Euphrates and on around the Fertile Crescent to the trail south along the Mediterranean. The arch of this crescent was flourishing in these times as a place of rich caravan trade.

This couple's caravan was impressive in the beginning; and Abraham increased his wealth as he traveled. Their long entourage consisted of menservants and maidservants as well as sheep, oxen, asses, and other herds and flocks. The extent of their household later may be imagined by the fact that, at Abraham's word, no less than 318 servants, born in his house and trained to arms, accompanied him to the rescue of his nephew, Lot. Those left to attend his flocks and herds, which he possessed in great numbers, must have been in equal proportion. The beautiful confidence and true affection existing between Sarah and Abraham are reflected in the authority she had over this household during his absence. He recognized her as his equal. She never subjected herself to a lesser role, and Abraham never demanded it.

We can picture their long caravan with its riding animals brilliantly attired with wool and bead trappings, as were their riders, forming a cavalcade of color as it moved from the fertile green valley into the parched land where little grew but dry thornbushes and tamarisk trees.

Perhaps the most impressive figure in the caravan was Sarah herself. *Though* Bible records furnish no further details than the fact that she was "a fair woman to look upon," we can picture her as wearing a flowing robe blending several rich colors, perhaps the warm reds and azure blue made familiar by the old masters. The drapery of her robe extended to a headdress with a veil that partly hid her face. It is easy to imagine she might have had alluring auburn hair, plaited and coiled in halo effect, exquisite olive skin, red lips and cheeks, deep-set eyes that brightened as she smiled, and a figure both commanding and graceful.

Sarah was a princess in bearing and character, as her name signified. From Babylonia, she brought with her the name of Sarai, but fourteen years later, at the time of her approaching motherhood, God changed her name from Sarai to Sarah, and her husband's name from Abram to Abraham (Gen. 17:5, 15).

Sarah was her husband's half-sister on the side of their father Terah, who had journeyed with them from Ur as far as Haran. Such marriages were not uncommon in the early patriarchal era. As Sarah and Abraham journeyed through strange and perilous country, Abraham passed his wife off as his sister, which was a half-truth. Possibly it was because he knew that these ancient monarchs would employ any means, however cruel and violent, to get the radiantly beautiful Sarah into their harems. Early in their wanderings Sarah was taken into King Pharaoh's court, but it is evident from the record that her ardent affection for Abraham was not diminished by the pomp, riches, and power of a great Egyptian king. Josephus informs us that Sarah, courageous and unafraid, admitted to her royal admirer that she was the wife of Abraham; consequently Pharaoh gave many gifts to Abraham because of the beautiful Sarah. Isn't it to Sarah's credit that her own fidelity to Abraham secured her escape?

The same situation recurred when Sarah and Abraham arrived, a decade or more later, at the court of Abimelech in Gerar. This king, too, we are told, desired Sarah for his harem, though these two similar stories may be variant records of the same incident.

Growing impatient for the birth of Abraham's promised son, and not understanding the divine delay, Sarah concluded she was the obstacle. The promise had been made about eleven years before when Sarah and Abraham had left their homeland. Because she had not yet conceived, Sarah devised the plan of giving her maid Hagar, probably obtained as a gift from Pharaoh, to her husband as a secondary wife, a common custom in patriarchal times. Hagar, who had become the favorite in Sarah's large household of servants, evidently enjoyed her mistress' full confidence.

With wavering faith but with a willingness to forsake her own vanity, Sarah went to Abraham and said, "Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai" (Gen. 16:2).

Sarah's lack of faith in her ability to give birth to a child of her own was to bring long years of anguish, for this child by the bondswoman Hagar, she later would learn, was not the child God had promised. According to an ancient custom, the child of such a union as Sarah proposed between her maid and her husband would be regarded as Sarah's own child.

After having been admitted to intimacy with Abraham, and after learning she had conceived by him, Hagar became proud and assuming and quickly forgot her mistress' generosity in exalting her from the position of bondswoman to that of concubine. Understandably human, Sarah showed her worst self when she uttered reproach to her husband: "I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee" (Gen. 16:5).

Sarah, we can be quite certain, still enjoyed the love and confidence of her husband, for when she complained to Abraham about Hagar's insolence and impudence, he answered her saying, "Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee" (Gen. 16:6). That was reassurance enough of Abraham's affection for Sarah and his recognition of her supremacy over a maid, even one who was to bear him a child.

Not one to submit tamely to ingratitude, Sarah took quick steps to; reprimand Hagar. In no state of mind to take such reprimands, Hagar fled into the wilderness. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands" (Gen. 16:9).

There is no record that further enmity between Sarah and Hagar occurred until about fourteen years later. Sarah doubtless had formed an attachment to Hagar's son Ishmael, her foster son, and may even have regarded him as the Son of Promise. When the boy was thirteen years old, Abraham was circumcized, signifying that he had entered upon a covenant with God. Then God told Abraham that He would not establish His covenant with Ishmael but with a son whom Sarah would bear.

Soon after this three men came toward him as he sat in his tent door. Desiring to offer them his best hospitality, he hastened to Sarah's tent and asked her to make cakes upon the hearth for their guests. In this service Sarah became the first woman in the Bible to extend hospitality to guests.

Her guests turned out to be divine messengers who had come to tell Abraham that Sarah would give birth to a son. Out of curiosity Sarah was listening to their conversation from her own tent. Not knowing who these strangers were, "Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" (Gen. 18:12). In a later passage (Gen. 18:15) it is explained that she had laughed because she was afraid. Could it be that her laughter came from a sorrowful heart, that her mirth represented a heaviness of spirit? (Prov. 14:13).

Sarah surely had developed great faith or she could not have become the mother in the Bible's first story of a miracle birth. The ancient writers' ho recorded her story believed that with God nothing was impossible, not even the birth of a child to a woman long past the age to bear children.

Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, in speaking on salvation that comes not by law but through faith, best expresses the miracle of Isaac's birth in this manner, "And being not weak in faith, he [Abraham] considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb" (Rom. 4:19).

Soon Sarah was to know all the bliss of a young mother. She would even nurse her child at her own breast, experiencing the while a visible manifestation of the wonderful power and unchanging love of God. In later years her son Isaac would display tenderhearted qualities, evidence enough of the gentle influence of his mother in these formative years of his life.

On one of Isaac's birthdays, probably his third, his father made a great public feast, celebrating the child's weaning. At this feast, during which throngs of guests rejoiced, Hagar and Ishmael, who was now about seventeen years old, stood aside mocking. Once more Sarah, a woman of positive decision, demanded of Abraham, "Cast out this bondswoman and her son: for the son of this bondswoman shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac" (Gen. 21:10).

Like any mother of a toddling youngster, Sarah did not look forward to rearing him with a rough half-brother and his jealous mother. Probably there was more wisdom than harshness in the positive stand Sarah took against Hagar and Ishmael, for we have the record that God spoke again to Abraham, saying, "Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondswoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Gen. 21:12).

Early the next morning Abraham sent away the bondswoman and her son, first placing on her shoulder a skin bottle of water. Though Abraham had been Hagar's legal custodian, he now followed the patriarchal custom when he turned her out, because of her misdemeanors toward his wife. Though in distress when expelled from the household of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar was to find new strength from God, a God who had mercy even upon those who had acted wrongly. He protected Hagar by filling her jug with water and by teaching her son Ishmael to become an expert with the bow.

Now Sarah could instruct her son Isaac in wisdom and piety, without the discord that had been created by these two who had mocked her. Sarah is not to be condoned, of course, for not showing more love, even to those who had mocked her. But in this wasn't she protecting her child rather than herself?

As Isaac reached manhood, Sarah was to come face to face with an even greater trial. At God's command, Abraham set forth with their beloved Son of Promise to sacrifice him upon an altar. As Sarah sorrowfully watched her husband and son depart for the mountains in the land of Moriah, we can imagine her anguish of heart. And yet this woman who had developed great faith could now turn to the same omnipotent God who had miraculously brought forth her child in her old age. He was a God of love and mercy and majesty. She would remain obedient to him.

Anxiety and sorrow were not to overwhelm her for long. She soon would learn that God did not demand the sacrifice of a son. A ram would be offered up instead of Isaac.

We have no record of Sarah in the years that follow her son's and husband's return from Moriah, but we can assume she enjoyed the love and companionship of a devoted husband and a loyal son until her death at the age of one hundred and twenty-seven years. She is the only woman in the Bible whose age at death is recorded. This again signifies the important place that she held in the minds of early Hebrews.

In the Cave of Machpelah, near Abraham's well-loved oak of Mamre, Sarah was buried. In selecting this site for his wife's last resting place, again Abraham demonstrated his great affection for her. Records tell us also that he "mourned" for her (Gen. 23:2). A few years later, on his wedding night, Isaac took his bride Rebekah to his mother's own tent, thus showing how fondly he, too, cherished her memory.

At Hebron, over the cave of Machpelah which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23) there stands today a conservative Moslem mosque. The lower portions of the walls surrounding the enclosure are believed to date from the time of Solomon. Here in the mosque are the cenotaphs of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and other descendants of their family, erected just above their tombs in the cave below. Sarah, the first matriarch in the Bible, lies there in the honored place.

In Hebrews 11:11, she is mentioned with those whose faith was outstanding. It says of her: "Through faith also Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised." In Galatians 4:23-31, she is the freewoman in what is called the Allegory of Agar or Hagar. The allegory tells that it was the freewoman (Sarah) who gave birth to a child according to the Spirit, while the bondwoman (Hagar) gave birth to a child according to the flesh.

The fact that Sarah is mentioned in three other places in the New Testament, I Peter 3:6 and Romans 4: 19 and 9:9, as well as in Isaiah 51:2, is evidence of the revered place she held in Hebrew history. Today this "Mother of Nations" lives on, some four thousand years later, as the woman whose faith helped to achieve one of the miracle births of the Bible.

LOT'S WIFE

Lives at Sodom, enjoying all luxuries and gaieties that rich husband could provide. When destruction comes upon Sodom, she refuses to leave. Looks back and is turned to pillar of salt.

GEN. 19:26

LUKE 17:32

THE WOMAN WHO LOOKED BACK

FIFTEEN words in the Old Testament tell the story of Lot's wife. This one brief, dramatic record has placed her among the wellknown women of the world. The fifteen words are, "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Gen. 19:26).

In the New Testament there are three other words about Lot's wife. Jesus held her up as an example, saying, "Remember Lot's wife" (Luke 17:32). This is one of the shortest verses in the Bible. Its terseness probably best explains its urgency. In a previous passage Jesus had been speaking of those in the days of Lot, who "did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded," but "out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all" (Luke 17:28, 29).

The impression is conveyed that Lot's wife was a woman who ate and drank and lived for the things of the world. We do have a scriptural record that her husband was a rich and influential man (Gen. 13:10, 11). We can easily assume that Lot's wife was a worldly, selfish woman, one who spent lavishly and entertained elaborately. Max Eastman, in his movingly realistic poem *Lot's Wife* says, "Herself, like Sodom's towers, shone blazingly." Here, we imagine, was a woman who wore many jewels and dressed in the richest and most gleaming fabrics.

Rubens, in his "Flight of Lot," painted in 1625 and now in the Louvre, pictures Lot's wife, followed by her daughters; to her one of the angels is speaking a solemn warning. One of the daughters leads an ass loaded with splendid vessels of gold and silver, while the second bears a basket of grapes and other fruits on her head. The wife clasps her hands and looks beseechingly in the face of the angel who warns her of her fate if she should be disobedient. The family procession, accompanied by a spirited little dog, steps forth from the handsome gates of Sodom. Above the towers of the city walls fly frightful demons preparatory to their work of destruction. The air seems full of imps, while an evil spirit, hovering above Lot's wife, glowers at the angel who is trying to save her from destruction.

The fate of Lot's wife has inspired other painters, among them Gozzoli and Lucas Cranach. All depict a woman who had lived under the law, knew its penalties to be swift and immutable, and yet so loved the city on which God was raining fire from heaven that she willingly gave her life for one more look at it.

Can we not conjecture that the fifteen-word Old Testament biography of Lot's wife was written for those who love the things of the world more than the things of the spirit, those who do not possess the pioneering courage to leave a life of ease and comfort and position for a life of sacrifice, hardship, and loneliness? Does not her biography also speak a message to those who are unwilling to flee from iniquity when all efforts to redeem iniquity have failed?

Dr. William B. Riley, in his book on *Wives of the Bible*, makes the apt comment that "When we have read Lot's history we have uncovered Mrs. Lot's character; and when we have studied his affluence, we have seen her influence. . . . The character and conduct of children reflect the mother. The marriage of her daughters to Sodomish men indicated low ethical ideals and low moral standards." Their later relations with their father were a blot on their mother's character (Gen. 19:32-35). Lot's earlier actions toward Abraham indicated the type of wife he had. When he and his uncle Abraham had become prosperous in herds and flocks, Abraham offered Lot a choice of territory. And what did he choose? He chose the most fertile plain of the Jordan. Though we have no record of his wife in this transaction, we again can visualize her as a woman sharing in his selfishness, without dissent, and prodding her husband to greater wealth at any cost to others.

Goethe has said, "Tell me with whom thou dost company and I will tell thee what thou art." Our best way of describing Lot's wife is through her husband and her children and her disobedience to the warning of angels. The latter could have saved her, but she had nothing in common with angels.

When her husband had first come into this fertile plain of Jordan, he had pitched his tent "toward Sodom," a phrase which indicates that Lot was not then a part of the wicked Sodom and Gomorrah. But again, isn't it easy to imagine that his wife wanted a big stone house in keeping with her husband's great wealth? Was a tent on the outskirts enough? Wasn't she hopelessly bound up with all the materialities of Sodom?

When she had to flee, she had to look back. In this she reminds us of a woman who, after leaving her burning house, rushes back for treasured material possessions and is burned with the possessions.

Certainly Lot's wife bears none of the qualities of greatness that we find in the noble women in history—those, for example, who left England on the *Mayflower* and landed on a desolate coast in the dead of winter to carve new homes in the wilderness. These women, too, had to leave all behind, but they were willing to make the sacrifice in order that they and their families might have religious freedom.

Even though Lot's wife was well out of Sodom with her daughters and husband before the destruction came, she could not be influenced either by the warnings of the angels or by the pleadings of her husband. And as she looked back, she was turned to a pillar of salt.

Tradition has pointed out, however, that a mountain of salt, at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea, was the spot where the event took place. The text described it as a rain of "brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven" by which the whole district was overthrown.

Geologists explain that at the south end of the Dead Sea is a burned-out region of oil and asphalt. A great stratum of rock salt lies underneath the Mountain of Sodom on the west shore of the sea. This stratum of salt, they say, is overlaid with a stratum of marl, mingled with free sulphur in a very pure state. Something kindled the gases which accumulate with oil and asphalt, and there was an explosion. Salt and sulphur were carried up into the heavens red hot. Literally it could have rained fire and brimstone. The cities and the whole plain and everything that grew out of the ground were utterly destroyed. This may explain the incrustation of Lot's wife with salt when she turned back.

The differences of opinion regarding the myth and the literal aspect of Lot's wife do not change the great truths of the story. She still stands as a permanent symbol of the woman who looks back and refuses to move forward, the woman who, faced toward salvation, still turns to look longingly on material things she has left behind.

One thing is certain. The story of Lot's wife has not lost its savor in all the thousands of years since Old Testament writers recorded it.

REBEKAH

Meets Abraham's servant as she carries water to well. He is looking for wife for Isaac and is attracted by her courtesy and kindness. She and her damsels journey with him to Canaan where Isaac awaits her. After twenty years she gives birth to twins, Esau and Jacob. Deceives husband in order to win his blessing on Jacob. She is buried at Machpelah.

GEN. 22:23-24:15, 29, 30, 45, 51, 53, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 67; 25:20, 21, 28; 26:7, 8, 35; 27:5, 6, 11, 15, 42, 46; 28:5; 29:12; 35:8; 49:31
ROM. 9:10

MOTHER OF TWINS, ESAU AND JACOB

IN a setting of romance and wonder Rebekah is introduced, and from her first sharply etched portrait at the well at Nahor in Mesopotamia she attracts interest. Even in this first scene we seem to sense the kindness in her heart, to hear the music in her voice, and to see the grace in her motions. At the same time we know she is chaste, courteous, helpful, industrious, and trusting.

No young woman in the Bible is so appealing. One of the old masters has depicted Rebekah in a flowing dress of delft blue and a headdress of scarlet and purple. The dress neckline is striped in gold to match the gold in her necklace, ear-screws, and bracelets. The artist has given her a dark, patrician profile, broadly arched eyebrows, gentle but expressive eyes, a slightly aquiline nose, and a firm yet innocent mouth.

At eventide it was that she came to the well, carrying her pitcher on her shoulder. With other women, young and old, who had come to draw water, she took the well-worn trail to the town watering place. Though Rebekah was unaware of it, she was being observed by a meditative old man, a stranger from far away, who stood by with ten thirsty camels.

He had only a little while before concluded a long, tiresome trek from the land of Canaan, home of his master, Abraham. As the latter's steward he faced a grave responsibility, that of choosing a wife for his master's son, Isaac. He had approached his task prayerfully and had asked God for a sign to help him make the right choice. What would be the sign? The young maiden who volunteered to give water to his camels after he asked her for a drink for himself would possess those traits of character he was looking for in a wife for his master's son. How little Rebekah knew of the high destiny that awaited her simply because she volunteered a service that would be only natural to her.

Kneeling in the shadows of the deepening twilight, Abraham's zealous steward, who had been his designated heir before the birth of his sons, spoke to his invisible protector: "O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham" (Gen. 24:12).

Eliezer had hardly finished his petition to God when behold there stood before him this lovely maiden Rebekah. The faithful servant hastened to her and said, "Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher" (Gen. 24:17). She gave him a drink with ready grace and then there came the sign for which the servant had been waiting. "I will draw water for thy camels, also, until they have done drinking," she said (Gen. 24:19).

Rebekah must have had to make several trips down to the well in order to carry enough water in a pitcher for ten thirsty camels. Eliezer gazed in silence, believing all the more in God's goodness. Before asking who her kindred were, he rewarded her with an earring and two bracelets, all of heavy gold.

Then he asked, "Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in?" (Gen. 24:23). When Rebekah told him she was the daughter of Bethuel, whom the servant knew to be his master's nephew, and when she also added graciously, "We

have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in," he humbly thanked God for leading him to the house of his master's kinsman (Gen. 24:25).

The scene that followed moved fast. After Abraham's steward explained to Rebekah's family the purpose of his visit, he gave lavish gifts to her mother and brother Laban and other members of the family. And Rebekah soon learned that her future husband, Isaac, who was her second cousin, was heir to his father's flocks and herds, silver and gold, menservants and maidservants, and many asses. But of greater significance was the fact that God had established his covenant with Abraham and his son Isaac, and Rebekah would be a participant in that covenant.

When Rebekah's family asked her, "Wilt thou go with this man?" she replied without any hesitancy, "I will go." A woman of positive direction, Rebekah also had the courage and spirit which would enable her to forsake home and family for a new life in a strange country.

Apprehensive, however, about giving up their beloved daughter, her family asked that she remain for a few days, at least ten; but Abraham's steward was in haste to be on his way. So we picture the eager-hearted Rebekah departing with her nurse Deborah and her maids on camels. We can see her family bidding her good-by and then watching longingly as the caravan disappeared through the Balikh Valley.

Then it crossed the banks of the Euphrates into the pathless and sun-bleached sands of the desert on its way to Damascus. It passed over the Lebanon highlands into the green hills of Galilee and finally drew near the yellow plains around Beer-sheba. As the caravan came into the more fertile fields. Rebekah saw an upright man walking forth in his field, bearing in his measured tread the aspect of one in holy meditation. He had seen the camels coming and had gone into his fields to pray. As Rebekah drew near, she lowered her veil in the manner of oriental women and alighted from her camel.

After Abraham's steward explained all that had taken place on the journey, Isaac took Rebekah into his mother's tent, a sacred place to him, and she became his wife. "And he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" is the brief but graphic account of the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen. 24:67). We can imagine that Isaac rejoiced when he saw in Rebekah a reflection of the endearing qualities of his mother, Sarah.

Isaac was now forty, and we can assume that Rebekah was some twenty years younger. Her husband, an agriculturist as well as a cattle raiser, enjoyed great affluence, and we can be sure that these were satisfying years for Rebekah. Though there is little record of her life between her marriage and twenty years later when she gave birth to twins, we can imagine she became a woman of sympathy, foresight, and religious fervor. And we can be certain that she enjoyed peace at home, for her marriage to Isaac is the first monogamous marriage on record.

Only one blessing was lacking in Rebekah's life. She had not conceived, but when she did conceive, she discovered that she was to have twins. We have this record, "And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the Lord" (Gen. 25:22). This is the first recorded instance of a woman's immediate appeal to God.

God told Rebekah that two nations were in her womb and two manner of people, and that the elder should serve the younger. The struggle is represented as prefiguring the struggle for supremacy between Edom and Israel, descended respectively from Esau and Jacob. And when the first-born Esau came forth, he was red all over like a hairy garment, indicating that he would be material-minded. And then came Jacob, destined to be the more spiritual-minded of the two. Who would be more aware of this than their devout mother? Isaac, quiet and retiring, was drawn to the bold, daring, strong, and roaming Esau; and Rebekah, naturally industrious, was drawn to the gentle but impetuous Jacob.

As the sons grew to manhood, their mother began to love wisely but not always too well. And she began to plan how Jacob, the lastborn, and not Esau, the first-born, could receive his father's blessing.

Esau had already voluntarily surrendered to Jacob his birthright, and all for bread and a pottage of lentils. The birthright, which Esau's mother knew he had sold so casually to satisfy his hunger, was a very valuable right of an older son. Not only did it assure to its possessor a double share of his father's inheritance, but it carried with it a position of honor as head of the family as well. All this now belonged to Jacob.

All that was lacking was for Jacob to obtain his father's blessing, which would secure to him the birthright of his older brother and all the advantages that birthright entailed. Isaac was now an old man and blind, and his last days seemed near at hand.

Records do not furnish actual historical details, but we can be sure that Rebekah was a mother who pondered deeply over her son's destiny. She recognized the secular bent of the first-born, Esau, and the priestly mold of the last-born, Jacob. Had she not also observed how Esau's associates were the Hittites, known to be a less religious race? (He had even married two Hittite women, Judith and Bashemath, and in that marriage had returned to the polygamous way of life which she and Isaac had abandoned. Had she not observed how Esau spent his time in hunting and other such pleasures while Jacob worshiped at the altar of God? Had she not seen how Esau lived for today and how Jacob, like herself, looked into the future? Had she not seen in Esau's face a love for a mess of pottage and in Jacob's a dream of divine glory?

Yet it was Isaac alone who would ordain his successor. And she had heard him say to Esau, "Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless thee before the Lord before my death" (Gen. 27:7).

This sounded the death knell of a proud mother's hopes. And this mother was human. She began to plot an act that was deep, dark, disconcerting. All through her life Rebekah had never wavered in purpose. Even when she left her homeland for another country, she proceeded with positive direction.

But now in this crisis in her favorite son's life, she perceived dearly too, but her faith wavered. She took quick action, guiding her steps and those of her favorite son by her will, not God's will. One wonders if she did not fall by the very weight of the burden which she believed she was carrying for God. She could not picture Esau as a leader following the great traditions of her people. Only Jacob could fill that high trust. And so it was her fears overwhelmed her and she forgot God's part in the affairs of men.

While Esau was bounding over the hills, busy in the chase for venison for his old and feeble father, Rebekah sent Jacob to bring back two kids from a pasture near by. And she prepared the savory dish, probably seasoning the kids' flesh with onion, garlic, salt, and lemon juice. She also took pieces of goat's skin and bound them on Jacob's hands and neck; its silken hair would resemble that on the cheek of a young man. Next she gave him the long white robe, the vestment of the first-born, which she had kept in a chest with fragrant herbs and perfumed flowers.

We cannot make any excuses for Rebekah's actions in deceiving her blind husband and at the same time influencing her son in what was wrong. But may we not say that, though her actions were morally indefensible, her motive was pure? Does she not typify the mother down the ages who, weak in faith, imagines herself to be carrying out the will of God? And was she not willing to assume all the responsibility for this deception?

For Jacob had said to his mother, "My father peradventure will feel me, and I shall seem to him as a deceiver; and I shall bring a curse upon me, and not a blessing" (Gen. 27:12).

But his mother hastily replied, "Upon me be thy curse, my son" (Gen. 27:13). What a burden for a mother to assume! And could she assume it alone? Wouldn't they both be guilty of deceiving Isaac and Esau?

But Rebekah did not falter in her purpose. She saw her blind husband prayerfully bestow upon her favorite the blessing which could never be revoked. When her other son learned what had been done by his mother and brother, he threatened to kill his brother. Rebekah must now suffer for her wrong. She must give up what she loved most, her favorite son. Again with positive direction, yet willing to sacrifice herself, she called him forth and sent him to her brother Laban in Mesopotamia.

An old woman now, Rebekah bade her beloved Jacob good-by as he started on his long journey, with his staff in his hand and his bundle of clothes over his shoulder. We can picture her as she took a long, last look before her son's form became lost on the horizon.

The tinkle of goats' bells and the bleating of the sheep would be heard as usual. The sun would rise in splendor and would go down again. When night fell the stars would come out as usual, but Rebekah would never see Jacob again. More than twenty years would pass before he returned.

She would spend her last years with a son who would always remember his mother's part in deceiving him and with a husband who naturally had lost some of the confidence he once had in her. And she and Isaac both would grieve over the actions of Esau's two Hittite wives.

When Jacob did return, his mother would be sleeping by the side of Abraham and Sarah in Machpelah's quiet sepulcher.

RACHEL and LEAH

Jacob meets Rachel at well at Haran and makes covenant for her with her father Laban. Is deceived with Leah. Rachel given to Jacob on new pledge. Leah bears Jacob six sons and her maid bears two more. Rachel bears Joseph and her maid bears two more children. Rachel and Leah depart with husband for his homeland. Rachel takes father's gods and conceals them. She bears Benjamin and dies. Buried at Ephrath. Leah buried at Machpelah.

GEN. 29:6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31; 30:1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 14, 15, 22, 25; 31:4, 14, 19, 32, 33, 34; 33:1, 2, 7; 35:16, 19, 20, 24, 25; 46:19, 22, 25 48:7

RUTH 4:II

I SAM. 10:2

JER. 31:15

MATT. 2:18

GEN. 29:16, 17, 23, 32; 30:9, 10, II, 18, 19, 20 31:4, 14, 33 33:1, 2, 7 34:1; 35:23, 26 46:15, 18 49:31

RUTH 4:11; 24, 25, 30, 34; 13,14,16,17.

MOTHERS OF TWELVE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

THE Old Testament writer had an eye for the dramatic when he introduced the graceful, gentle, and lovely Rachel against a scene of pastoral beauty. When Jacob first came upon her, she was quietly tending her father's sheep on a low-lying hillside near the city of Haran.

This bright-eyed barefoot maiden, in her brilliantly colored and softly draped dress, must have been a joy to the homesick Jacob's eyes, for he had been on a long journey by foot, a distance of more than 500 miles from the hill country of Palestine to Padan-aram. And we can imagine he was scorched by the sun, and footsore and weary.

When he inquired of three shepherds about Laban, his mother's brother, he must have been comforted to hear shepherds reply, "Behold, Rachel his daughter cometh with the sheep" (Gen. 29:6). Jacob knew that this comely maiden was his mother's own niece, and not far away from this watering place his grandfather's steward had come upon his mother at the well.

As Rachel made her slow approach, Jacob rolled from the well a large boulder kept there to prevent the water from becoming polluted. And he gave water to Rachel's sheep, just as his mother Rebekah had given water to his grandfather Abraham's camels. Let us suppose that he and Rachel drank from the same dipper and that, from this moment, they were united in spirit.

One of Jacob's first acts was to kiss Rachel's hand as a respectful salutation; and as he did, he "wept," a demonstration of his joy, for he belonged to a demonstrative people, whose emotions ran deep.

After this meeting with Jacob, Rachel ran to her father, who warmly welcomed his nephew. These family ties became meaningful to Jacob, who was now far from home and possibly homesick for his devoted mother. He quickly became attached to his lovely and lovable Cousin Rachel and lost no time in asking her father if he might marry her. And Jacob offered his own labor for the riches he had not brought with him.

For Rachel, he promised to serve as a shepherd for seven years. "And they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her" (Gen. 29:20). These words are unsurpassed in the whole literature of romantic love. In fact Jacob's service for Rachel marks him as the most devoted lover in the Bible. And his love for Rachel was not a passing fancy. It would last until the end of his life.

When the time for their marriage came, however, confusions and complications arose. Rachel had an older sister Leah.

Leah is described in the King James Version as "tender eyed, while Rachel is described as "beautiful and well favoured." That Leah was much less beautiful than her sister is evident from the text, but it does not appear that she was as plain and homely as some commentators conjecture. In one translation she is called weak-eyed, in another sore-eyed. Could it be that she was verging on blindness? And if so, wouldn't her father have sought to marry her off as soon as he could?

There are many varying interpretations on Leah's eyes. The Midrash explains her "tender" eyes as due to her weeping lest she be compelled to marry Esau.

But we need not tarry too long on one word. The implication is that Leah, because of her problems, whatever they might have been, had had to turn within herself and had become more spiritually sensitive than her more "shallow-minded sister." We like to think that Leah's piety had given her eyes a tender quality, but it was the brighteyed, much gayer Rachel to whom Jacob was attracted.

At the end of the seven years, when the time had been set for the nuptial festivities, Laban sent Leah to Jacob instead of Rachel. This was an easy trick in primitive times, because it was the custom to conduct the bride to the bedchamber of her husband in silence and darkness. According to the laws of the time, the elder daughter should be married first, but it was not according to the agreement Laban had made with Jacob. As Jacob had deceived his father, so had Laban deceived him.

But according to Bible record, Jacob's union with Rachel was celebrated at the close of Leah's marriage festivities, lasting for about a week. Jacob, however, had to serve another seven years as a shepherd, making fourteen altogether, for his beloved Rachel.

It is easy to imagine that problems, many of them not recorded in the Bible text, arose in this polygamous household, where two sisters were married to the same man.

Rachel had Jacob's love, but Leah bore his first four sons. During those years Rachel had to listen to the crying and cooing of her sister's children, while she had none. Though Leah was blessed with children, she it was who hungered for Jacob's love.

Rachel was the more petulant, peevish, and self-willed of the two; Leah was more meek, submissive, and gentle. Because she was not loved, can we not believe that Leah sought peace in God's unfailing tenderness? She learned to demonstrate content in the midst of trial, and happiness in the midst of grief.

When her first son was born, she significantly called him Reuben, saying, "Surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me" (Gen. 29:32). Then she bore Simeon and Levi and finally Judah. In the birth of three of these sons, she recognized God, finally praising Him fervently.

God had blessed her abundantly. He had turned her mourning into praise and returned her meek, enduring confidence in Him. One wonders if Leah, even in her heavy affliction of being unloved, was not the more content, for she neither envied nor complained.

Rachel, still with empty arms and a heart longing for children, cried out to a doting husband, "Give me children, or else I die" (Gen. 30:1). Jacob, angered, asked her, "Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?" (Gen. 30:2).

What a striking contrast between Rachel's words and the words of her unloved, unsought, undesired, plainer, but more spiritually sensitive sister! The two sisters remind us of two plants, one frail and the other strong, and yet both growing in the same soil. Though these sisters stood in one environment most of the days of their lives, there was always this complete difference of character. They did not quarrel, but wrestled in mind and spirit through all of their lives. When her maid Bilhah bore Jacob a second son, Rachel named him Naphtali, saying, "With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister" (Gen. 30:8). The first son by Bilhah was Dan.

And Leah, following the lead of Rachel, took her maid, Zilpah, and gave her to Jacob. And Zilpah bore Jacob two sons, Gad and Asher, who, according to the traditions of the time, were Leah's sons, now making six in all.

The sisters wrestled again when Reuben, Leah's eldest son, brought mandrakes from the field. This fruit, the size of a large plum and quite round, yellow, and full of soft pulp, was supposed to have a love charm. Both Rachel and Leah cast longing eyes on the mandrakes. Mace in his book on *Hebrew Marriage* states: "From the most ancient time, aphrodisiac virtues have been ascribed to the mandrake, which was therefore supposed to cure barrenness, and it is now known that the root, when eaten, would have the effect of relaxing the womb."

Rachel said to Leah, "Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes" (Gen. 30:14).

Leah, perturbed that her sister should want the mandrakes brought from the field by her own son, said to her, "Is it a small matter that thou has taken my husband? and wouldest thou take away my son's mandrakes also?" And Rachel answered, "Therefore he shall lie with thee tonight for thy son's mandrakes" (Gen. 30:15).

And Leah bore Jacob a fifth son, Issachar. Afterward she bore Jacob a sixth son, Zebulun, and then a daughter, Dinah, the first daughter in the Bible whose name is mentioned at birth. It was not until after the birth of all of Leah's children that Rachel bore Joseph, saying, "God hath taken away my reproach" (Gen. 30:23). We infer that prayer and not envy now filled Rachel's life. Later she would have a second son, Benjamin, thus completing the twelve tribes of Israel by two sisters and their two maids. But it would be Rachel's Joseph, often described as the most Christlike character in the Old Testament, who would come from the mystery of such love as Rachel and Jacob bore for each other.

After the birth of his beloved Joseph, Jacob began to long to return to his homeland. He had now been in Mesopotamia about twenty years, but he could not depart easily, for according to the laws of the time, Laban could still claim his children and his two wives. So it was that Jacob began to devise means whereby he might gain for himself large herds of cattle and sheep. In a few years, through his own craftiness, he had become a rich man.

For the first time we find the two wives, Rachel and Leah, united. This time they had aligned themselves unreservedly against their father. Jacob had called them from the field and reviewed to them how Laban had changed his wages ten times, how Laban also had coveted his increasing herds. Jacob related how in a dream he had been told to return to the land of his kindred.

This time one in thought, Rachel and Leah asked him, "Is there yet any portion or inheritance for us in our father's house? Are we not counted of him strangers? for he hath sold us, and hath quite devoured also our money. For all the riches which God hath taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's: now then, whatsoever God hath said unto thee, do" (Gen. 31:14-16).

When Jacob did not make the decision alone, but consulted his wives, he demonstrated that he, like other patriarchs, took no major steps without counseling with his wives. And Rachel and Leah regarded themselves as their husband's equal.

While his father-in-law was off sheep-shearing in a far country, Jacob, with his wives and eleven children and his herds, flocks, and servants, set off for his homeland in Canaan. Onward they trod, back again through many of the same valleys and over the same mountains and through the same endless sands which Jacob's grandfather Abraham and grandmother Sarah and mother Rebekah had trod.

Three days elapsed, and Rachel and Leah's father received word that his family had departed. He set out to follow them and on the seventh day he overtook his daughters and their large family in the hill country of Gilead.

From Jacob Rachel had kept one secret. She had brought with her the household idols worshiped by her father, who did not believe in Jacob's God. Why did she bring them? Possibly Rachel stole them from her father's home to insure the future prosperity of her husband. She doubtless believed that they brought good luck to their possessor. These household gods may even have secured for Jacob the inheritance of his father-in-law's property.

There is quite a contrast here in Rachel's actions. We wonder if Leah was concerned about a material inheritance. Did she not carry with her, wherever she went, not idols but a faith in Jacob's God? Probably she was not in the least perturbed when her father overtook them and cried out loudly over the loss of his gods, almost as loudly as he had cried out at the loss of his daughters and their children. Not knowing that Rachel possessed the gods, Jacob answered his angry father-in-law, "With whomsoever thou findest thy gods, let him not live" (Gen. 31:32).

Laban searched all the tents for his gods, first Leah's, then Rachel's. When he came to Rachel's he found her sitting on the camel's saddle, beneath which she had probably hidden her father's gods. There she sat and did not arise, but explained apologetically to her father, "Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me" (Gen. 31:35).

"The custom of women" has had many explanations. The *Interpreter's Bible* brings out the thought in its exegesis on this passage that Rachel means "she was ceremonially unclean" (Lev. 15:19-23). "She apologized for not rising when her father entered, pleading her condition. Laban searched in vain. Rachel, in her uncleanness even sat on them and nothing happened to her." That shows how little she feared the power her father believed they had.

Later we learn that Jacob hid all the strange gods that had been brought out of Mesopotamia under the oak at Shechem (Gen. 35:4). This leads us to believe that Rachel, like Jacob, now believed in Jehovah and not the strange gods of Mesopotamia; otherwise, could she have won Jacob's love so wholeheartedly? Rachel's actions, of course, are subject to varying interpretations. But let us not forget that any personality, ancient or modern, has elements that baffle analysis.

Fearing his brother Esau, who had threatened his life when he had left his homeland twenty years earlier, Jacob, as he now neared the edge of Canaan, thought of his family's safety. Because of his great love for Rachel, he assigned to her and to Joseph the place of greatest safety. "And he put the handmaids and their children foremost, and Leah and her children after, and Rachel and Joseph hindermost" (Gen. 33:2). He probably had another reason for this, as Rachel was now with child.

His fears were unwarranted, for Esau ran to meet him, embraced him, and kissed him. Though we can imagine Rachel rejoiced when her husband and his brother were reconciled, we are given every evidence that cares lingered on. For it is recorded that her nurse Deborah, who also had been the nurse to her mother-in-law, Rebekah, died and was buried beneath an oak at Beth-el. Could it be that Deborah had served as a midwife and had delivered most or all of Jacob's children? Now Rachel, as she journeyed into a strange land, must entrust herself to a new nurse.

We know, too, from the record that Leah also had her heartaches. When the caravan had arrived on the edge of Shechem, her daughter Dinah was defiled by Shechem, the son of Hamor.

As the caravan neared Ephrath, the pains of childbirth came upon Rachel, and she gave birth to her second son, Benjamin, in a cave. As she was dying, the first woman in the Bible to die in childbirth, she cried, "Call his name Ben-oni," meaning "child of sorrow." But his father called him Benjamin, meaning "son of happiness." And Rachel's Benjamin completed the number of Jacob's twelve sons, who were to be designated as the twelve tribes of Israel.

Like a refrain we seem to hear again Rachel's earlier cry, "Give me children, or else I die." Could it be that her too impatient cry was heard and answered? Children were bestowed upon Rachel and with them death. How little she knew what she had asked.

"Jacob set a pillar upon her grave" (Gen. 35:20), again showing his great love for her. That grave, still marked just outside of Bethlehem, is the oldest single memorial to a woman mentioned in the Bible.

Jacob had loved Rachel at first sight and he loved her until the end. His last poignant reference to Rachel was made some years later when he said, "And I buried her there in the way of Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem) (Gen. 48:7).

About ten centuries later, as Jeremiah contemplated the desperate plight of the northern exiles, he heard Rachel, their ancient mother, bemoaning them from her grave. More than seventeen centuries after Rachel's death, Matthew in 2:18 wrote, "In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not." Rama was a town on the border between Judah and Israel. It is here that Rachel is represented as raising her head from the tomb and weeping at seeing the whole land depopulated of her sons. In Jeremiah 31:15 we have much the same idea presented. Jeremiah had in mind the Ephraimites going into exile in Babylon.

Rachel's honors and blessing were many, but what of those last years of Leah, the unloved, undesired, and unsought wife? What compensation did she have at the end? Records do not furnish actual historical details, but since she survived Rachel, we know she took her place at last beside Jacob as his chief wife and they shared many long-to-be-cherished memories of their long lives together. Probably now Jacob relied on Leah's counsel, for there was no other to whom he could turn.

From Leah's son Judah came the tribe of Judah, from which came the line Boaz, Jesse, and David, which produced Jesus (Luke 3:23, 31-33). And from her son Levi sprang the priesthood. Though the latter son committed a great wrong against Shechem, he must later have been visited by God's special favor because he came to represent, in a sense, the priesthood.

In Ruth 4:11, Leah is honored beside Rachel as one which "did build the house of Israel."

DINAH

Daughter of Leah and Jacob, she sets out for Shechem alone. Is defiled by Shechem, son of prince. Her brothers demand his circumcision and that of other Shechemites. Brothers slay all males in city and wreck it. On dying day Jacob reproves sons for their wrath.

GEN. 30:21; 34:1, 3, 5, 13, 25, 26 46:15

AND HE DISHONORED HER

THE formidable caravan of Dinah's father Jacob had crossed the Jordan only a little while before and was now encamped in the Shechem Valley, set among the rough highlands, in the pivotal pass between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, a pass *through* which migrants had trekked since the dawn of time.

After their long journey from Padam-aram, with several years spent in Succoth, Dinah and her mother Leah and others in their large family had come to stay for a time in this land of springs and green valleys. A meaningful event had occurred in the lives of this large family of eleven children by four mothers, Leah and Rachel and their maids Zilpah and Bilhah. That was the erection of an altar, El-elohe-Israel (God, the God of Israel). Land had been purchased from Hamor, prince of Shechem. But it is easy to imagine that the strange city of Shechem offered greater fascination to Dinah than did her father's altar; for she was young, and new and unknown places beckoned her onward.

Though we have no warrant in the Scriptures, by either direct word or inference, we can visualize Dinah as a beautiful girl, one who more closely resembled her "well favored" aunt Rachel than she did her mother Leah. We do know that Dinah was now about fourteen or fifteen years old, the marriageable age for orientals.

Like most girls in a large family of brothers, she longed for the company of other girls and "went out to see the daughters of the land" (Gen. 34:1). Josephus relates that she went to attend a festival at Shechem.

Dinah had every blessing, a father both devout and affluent, a spiritually sensitive mother, and ten brothers. But because she was an only daughter, she may have been pampered and spoiled, maybe a bit vain.

Let us imagine it was the spring of the year. The air was cool, and the wind wafted the fragrance of meadow saffron, wild narcissus, and hyacinth, all growing profusely in the Shechem Valley. We can see her wandering off into the picturesque countryside, expecting possibly to go only a short distance. For it is likely she had never been out of sight of her father's tents unaccompanied. Those tents, of black goat's hair woven in narrow strips on a homemade loom, receded into the distance as this simple, inexperienced girl pressed forward into the city of Shechem.

Let us picture her in a graceful tunic-style dress of a soft pastel color, in the tones of the early spring flowers. Perhaps she was also wearing a veil that fell softly across her face, revealing the beauty, y of innocent eyes which had no fear of the evils of a big city, because they had witnessed none.

If Dinah had listened to the stories of her own family, she should have known better. When her grandfather Isaac had gone down to Gerar with his wife Rebekah, he had passed her off as his: sister, in order to keep her from being seized by strange men in the `` town, for no unprotected woman was safe in these primitive times. ; And her great grandfather Abraham had. offered the same kind of protection to his wife Sarah as they journeyed into Egypt.

But the innocent Dinah went out as unprotected as a common harlot; and when Shechem, the son of Hamor, from whom her father had bought land, saw this comely, strange girl, he desired her for his own. "He took her, and lay with her, and defiled her" (Gen. 34:2). The Hebrew translation implies that he took her by force.

When Jacob heard what had been done to his only daughter, he held his peace until his sons came in from the field. Hamor, the young man's father, had gone out to call on Jacob. But when Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, heard that their sister had been treated as a common harlot, they came to her defense.

The wrong he committed is the outstanding fact in the story of the young Shechem. However, there is a significant phrase, "And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel" (Gen. 34:3). And there is another about him: "He was more honourable than all the house of his father" (Gen. 34:19). These two phrases lead us to believe that he had more than a trivial affection for Dinah and that he would try to make amends for the wrong he had done.

His father offered any sum that Jacob might ask as a marriage present, in order that Shechem might marry Dinah. Hamor's cordiality to Dinah's brothers, however, draws a striking contrast to what he told his townsmen: "Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours?" (Gen. 35:23). That was what he told them, indicating that he was a man who saw greater riches for his own people in the marriage of his son and Jacob's only daughter.

But Dinah's brothers said, "We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised" (Gen. 34:14). Circumcision was the external rite by which persons were admitted members of the ancient church. It is evident that they did not seek to convert Shechem, but only made a show of religion-a cloak to cover their diabolical act. Shechem and his father were then circumcised, as were all men in the city. But Simeon and Levi, who were still angered went out the third day and slew Shechem and his father and took their sister out of Shechem's house. And then they slew all the other men in the city, plundering it as they went, and taking with them *flocks*, herds, asses, children, and wives of the men they had slain.

Angered that his sons had acted in such a treacherous and godless manner, Jacob did not even forgive Simeon and Levi on his deathbed (Gen. 49:5).

The most meaningful phrase in the whole account is "which thing ought not to be done," referring of course to the defilement of Dinah. Those words provide a theme for a whole sermon.

Though Dinah's experience was repulsive and filled with cruelty and immorality, it does point up the high value these early Hebrews placed on chastity among women.

In the next Bible chapter following this one on Dinah we find Jacob and his family-and let us believe Dinah was there, too-, . going up to Beth-el, about thirty miles from Shechem, to worship. The family had been aroused from its spiritual indolence; it was , a period when sudden tragedies, such as the defilement of an only ; and beloved daughter, could come to a family.

TAMAR

Daughter-in-law of Judah and childless widow of two brothers, Er and Onan. By her own craft, she demands her rights to motherhood through levirate law. Becomes mother of twins through her father-in-law

GEN. 38:6, 11, 13, 24 RUTH 4:12

1 CHRON. 2:4

"SHE HATH BEEN MORE RIGHTEOUS THAN I"

THOUGH events centering around Tamar's life are quite confused and intolerable, according to today's moral standards, her actions were consistent with the standards of morality prevailing in the primitive era in which she lived.

The Genesis account of Tamar serves a dual purpose. First, it is one of the Bible's best examples of the levirate marriage law. This was the ancient custom of marriage between a man and the widow of his brother required by the Mosaic law when there was no male issue and when the two brothers had been residing on the same family property. The law, of course, takes its name from the noun levir, meaning a husband's brother. Second, this Genesis account of Tamar gives us the Bible's most graphic picture of how a quickwitted widow of early Israel protected herself and her family rights.

Tamar, not a wicked woman at all, plays a meaningful role in Old Testament history as the mother of Pharez, ancestor of King David. When she had lost two husbands, both of whom were brothers, and was refused the remaining young brother, she still had the courage to demand her rights to motherhood by law. What did she do? After her mother-in-law's death, she turned to the father of her husband. The legitimacy and courage of her action are implied in every move she makes.

Scripture does not mention Tamar's parentage or place of birth but proceeds to introduce her by saying that her first husband Er "was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him" (Gen. 38:7). Next she became the wife of his brother Onan, who "displeased the Lord: wherefore he slew him also" (Gen. 38:10).

This union of Tamar with Onan shows the perfect working of the levirate law, devised to retain the ownership of property within the family as well as to prevent the extinction of the family line. After her second husband's death, Judah advised his daughter-in-law Tamar to remain a widow at her father's house until his third son Shelah came of age. But fearing that Tamar possessed a sinister power, and that Shelah might die too, Judah delayed this third son's marriage with Tamar.

A considerable time elapsed and then Judah's wife died. The love of offspring, still deep in the heart of Tamar, caused her to plan how she might seek her rights in motherhood from her father-in-law Judah. Since he had denied her his third son Shelah, she sought a way to force him to accept his responsibility as guaranteed to her by the levirate law.

When Tamar heard that Judah was soon to be in the hills of Tinath with his friend Hirah, the Adullamite, at great personal risk she set upon a plan of her own. It was sheep-shearing season, and many guests would come from the surrounding country. Tamar planned to be there, too, but under a disguise, so that Judah would not recognize her as the widow of his sons.

She removed her garments of widowhood, put on a veil to hide her face, and "wrapped herself," probably in a colorful and becoming festival robe.

Since Tamar's name was the same as that of the stately tropical tree of Bible lands, we can assume that she was a tall, sturdy woman with a graceful carriage, one who would command attention wherever she went. This time she chose to stand by the side of the road where Judah would pass by.

Not recognizing this woman with the veil-covered face as the widow of his two sons and thinking she was a harlot, Judah made advances to her and said, "Go to, I pray thee, let me come in unto thee" (Gen. 38:16).

Clever woman that she was, she said, "What wilt thou give me, that thou mayest come in unto me?" (Gen. 38:16).

"And he said, I will send thee a kid from the flock. And she said, Wilt thou give me a pledge, till thou send it? And he said, What pledge shall I give thee? And she said, Thy signet, and thy bracelets, and thy staff that is in thine hand. And he gave it her, and came in unto her, and she conceived by him" (Gen. 38:17-18).

The unscrupulous actions of Judah, with whom Tamar was here involved, and the noble actions of Joseph, whom Potiphar's wife tried to involve, present a striking contrast. Some commentators conjecture that is why the story of Potiphar's wife immediately follows that of Tamar.

Tamar now turned homeward, carrying with her the signet, bracelet, and staff that had belonged to Judah. Then she removed her veil and put on again the garment of widowhood. A short time afterward Judah sent the kid by his friend Hirah, who had been with him at Timnath for the sheep-shearing. And Judah requested that his more personal possessions be returned when the kid was delivered.

When Hirah entered the town where Tamar lived, carrying with him the kid, he asked for the harlot who had been by the side of the road, but the men told him there was no harlot in the place. This is the best evidence we have that Tamar was not a prostitute but a self-respecting woman, determined to outwit a man and demand her right to children, according to the laws of the time.

About three months later (Gen. 38:24), Judah received word that his daughter-in-law Tamar was "with child by whoredom." This phrase suggests the malicious gossip who had carried tales to Judah. Angered at this report, he ordered that his daughter-in-law be brought forth and burned, for that would have been the penalty if the report were true (Lev. 20:14). But when Tamar came before Judah, holding his signet, bracelets, and staff, she asked, "Discern, I pray thee, whose are these?" (Gen. 38:25).

Judah could not deny their ownership and admitted, "She hath been more righteous than I; because that I gave her not to Shelah my son. And he knew her again no more" (Gen. 38:26). The last phrase is evidence enough that Tamar was not a promiscuous woman. She had merely acted according to the laws and rather heroically at that; and we can be confident she had exonerated herself, and that Judah had absolved her of all guilt.

Thrice denied a child by a rightful husband, Tamar now gave birth to twins by Judah. Like the twins of Rebekah, there is a detailed account of the appearance of the elder Pharez, who became inheritor of the family birthright. Afterward his brother Zarah was born with the "scarlet thread upon his hand" that the midwife had tied there. The story of the birth of Tamar's sons depicts clearly a woman in travail and the birth of twins.

In the story of Ruth, another widow who also came to motherhood through the levirate law, we find worthy mention made of Tamar, who bore a child to Judah. Other Tamars follow her, one the "fair sister" (II Sam. 13:1) of Absalom and the other the woman of "fair countenance" (II Sam. 14:27) who was the daughter of Absalom. Could it be that they were namesakes of their courageous ancestress, who would not be deprived of her rights of motherhood?

POTIPHAR'S WIFE

Tries to seduce Joseph. He resists her. She seizes his coat, then tells lies on him to her husband and has him cast into prison. Remains silent on her own transgression.

GEN. 39:7, 8, 9, 12, 19

"BECAUSE THOU ART HIS WIFE"

AN ERRING woman remembered only by her wickedness—that was Potiphar's wife. When she attempted infidelity with young Joseph during her husband's absence from home, she disgraced the distinction she might have borne, that of respected wife of the chief of the Egyptian king's bodyguard.

Egyptian sculptures and paintings on the walls of ancient tombs help us to picture her as a woman wearing a dress of exceedingly fine linen, pleated into a chevron pattern in the back. Around her high waistline she wore an ornamental girdle and on her head a gold band set with jewels. Her sensual lips were heavily painted with a purplish pigment, and her slanting eyebrows were made darker with heavy black dye. Around her ankles were gold bands, and she wore other heavy jewelry in her ears and around her neck, and on her long tapering fingers were rings with large jewels.

We know she was a spoiled, selfish woman, probably older than Joseph and certainly more worldly. She knew nothing of Joseph's God and the high standards upheld by those who believed in Him. Her gods were the physical pleasures, and she spent her days trying to satisfy them.

The setting in which she moved was one of elegance and splendor. Her house, similar to Egyptian royal houses of that period of about 11700 B.C., had a block of high rooms surrounding the main room and inner garden court.

This Egyptian house kept Joseph, the young overseer, busy, for it had stables and harness rooms, shelter for small wooden chariots, servants' quarters, granary courtyards, and conical grain bins, as well as an agricultural center. Even the trees, set in brick tubs containing Nile mud, had to be watered daily. There were slaves to direct, purchases to be made in the market, and distinguished guests who demanded personal attentions.

As supervisor of all this, Joseph, who had been purchased from the Ishmaelites in the slave market, had risen to a place of high trust, for the young Hebrew was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious. We can be sure, too, that he was beautiful of form and face like his mother Rachel and humble and consecrated like his father Jacob.

It was with dignity that he moved about his master's house, wearing a skirt of fine linen tucked under a colorful belt from which hung a leather tab. On his feet were simple sandals with pointed upturned toes, and his abundant black hair probably hung to his shoulders. But one would be less likely to observe the details of his dress than his quiet demeanor and the noble qualities in his smoothshaven face.

He was a sturdy, stalwart youth whom evil women would delight to tempt. Potiphar's wife probably was dissatisfied with her own husband. Here in her own house was this handsome young Hebrew with whom she would like to take liberties.

Because Potiphar was one of King Pharaoh's important officials, it is quite natural to suppose he had to be away from home a great deal, and he had entrusted to Joseph not only the safekeeping of his most valuable possessions but also the protection of his family. For a man to feel safe about his family, especially his wife, he had to leave as overseer one who had not only superior ability but also a deep sense of integrity.

Potiphar's wife, however, had no appreciation of good character. After her husband had departed, she sought to become familiar with Joseph. And one day, when no men were about the house, she said to him, "Lie with me" (Gen. 39:7). But he resisted, for he had disciplined himself to do what was right.

He must have startled this evil woman when he answered her invitation by saying, "There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back anything from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9).

Potiphar's wife had not dealt with such an honorable man before. She was angered, but she was not outdone. Day by day she invited him into her private boudoir, but he always retreated from her advances, because he knew God had great purposes for him to serve, and he must uphold, that which was right and good.

Finally, when Potiphar's wife could not entice Joseph, she caught his garment in her hand and held it; but he fled, leaving it with her. This woman who had not received what she asked for determined to hurt Joseph, in order to save face herself. She screamed loudly to other men in the household, saying, "See, he hath brought in an Hebrew unto us to mock us; he came in unto me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice" (Gen. 39:14).

She now kept Joseph's garment and showed it to her husband on his return. When Potiphar saw it, he immediately cast Joseph into prison, for his wife had lied, saying, "The Hebrew servant, which thou hast brought unto us, came in unto me to mock me: And it came to pass, as I lifted up my voice and cried, that he left his garment with me, and fled out" (Gen. 39:17-18).

These are the last words of this despicable woman, who has become a symbol of the faithless wife. Her obscurity, except for her wickedness, is final, but the young Joseph rose to noble stature, even within prison walls. Her own silence, in face of the youth's term in prison, is even greater admission to the bad character of Potiphar's wife, who was not only a sensualist but also a coward who could not admit her own guilt.

CHAPTER 2 Women of Israel's Heroic Age

JOCHEBED

Daughter of Levi and wife of Amram of House of Levi. Mother of Miriam, Aaron, and Moses. Realizes when the latter is a baby that he has a high destiny. Makes an ark and hides him. During his formative years she nurses him in court of King Pharaoh, where he has been adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.

Exod. 6:20 NUM. 26:59

BY FAITH SHE HID HER BABY

FROM her faith in things unseen, Jochebed gained her strength and force. A mother who had learned to trust her Creator and not to doubt, she seemed to be united to the promises of God, absorbed by them and exhilarated by them.

Her whole background speaks of her holiness, the kind that strengthens faith. She was the daughter of Levi (Num. 26:59), born in Egypt, and she became the wife of Amram, grandson of Levi, son of Jacob. From this Levi line, the Levites, charged with the care of the sanctuary, were descended. Jochebed handed down the priestly tradition of her family to her children. Her son Aaron was set apart to be a priest and became the

center and founder of the Hebrew priesthood, which he served for almost forty years. Her daughter Miriam led the Israelites in a moment when their faith came alive as they crossed the Sea of Reeds.

But as the mother of Moses, Hebrew lawgiver, statesman, and leader, Jochebed rises up today, some thirty-three centuries later, as one of the immortal mothers of Israel. Interesting it is to note that three times the Scriptures tell us that even when he was a tiny babe there was something special about Moses. In Exodus 2:2 he is called a "goodly child"; in Acts 7:20 he is described as "exceedingly fair" and in Hebrews 11:23 a "proper child." Something, let us be sure, beamed from the features of this child that only a godly mother could understand.

Do we not see in Jochebed some of the qualities of Mary, mother of Jesus, who recognized that her baby was destined by God for some special purpose? Like Mary, Jochebed must also have seen intimations of her child's high destiny and "pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). And Jochebed, again like Mary, was willing to suppress her own maternal love and to dedicate her son to that to which he had been called by God.

It was probably near Memphis in northeast Egypt that Jochebed gave birth to Moses, in the second half of the second millennium B.C. It has been suggested that Levi's daughter Jochebed was more likely an ancestress of Moses rather than his own mother, for many generations must have intervened between the arrival of Jacob's twelve sons in Egypt and the birth of Moses. But like the birthplace and first names of mothers of many great men who rise up out of obscurity, this mother of Moses did not achieve importance until decades, or maybe centuries, later. By this time it was difficult to trace many, of the facts centering around her life. But what does a first name matter for this mother of faith?

By name, Jochebed is mentioned only twice in the Bible, but her eminence as a mother in Israel is not thus obscured. Though the meager record we have of her life concerns the first years of Moses' childhood, her greatness rises up like an imperishable monument. And though she is never vividly described, as are many of the great mothers in the Bible, Jochebed lives on because she walked humbly before her God and because she transmitted character to her son Moses, her daughter Miriam, and her older son Aaron. She lives on, too, not by how many big tasks she accomplished, but by how wisely and well she served as a mother.

At the time when Jochebed gave birth to Moses, the Pharaoh had issued an edict to midwives to kill all Hebrew male children at birth. Moses had a natural birth, but the fact that he survived and grew up when all male Hebrew children were being destroyed is noteworthy. Pharaoh's orders were not unlike those of King Herod, who, many centuries later in the time of Jesus, ordered that all male children in Bethlehem two years old or under be destroyed. In spite of this measure, which Pharaoh had taken for the destruction of a people, Israel's deliverance would eventually be accomplished.

How Jochebed managed to save her son from Pharaoh's edict during the first three months of Moses' life is not recorded. We can imagine she might have hidden him in a donkey stable or a storage room where she kept clay jars filled with grain, peppercorns, onions, bread, dates, and other foods. But after he became three months old, she knew she could no longer take the risk of hiding him.

Through these months of anxiety, we can be sure that she lived close to her God. He had endowed her with sufficient wisdom and ingenuity to conceal her boy for three months. Now she knew that her God of infinite compassion would not forsake her. She had faith enough to enter upon a plan fraught with danger, that of leaving her baby in a handmade ark floating at the water's edge close to the dangerous current of the Nile River.

What courage she must have had as she wove by hand the ark of bulrushes out of the long, pliant, tenacious stems of the papyrus plant. This plant itself, she knew, was a protection against crocodiles. What positive faith, too, she must have had that God would protect her child. And yet for Jochebed faith was accompanied by careful planning and work. She not only wove the ark but with her own hands plastered it inside with clay to make it smooth and outside with bitumen to make it watertight. Her faith was not without wisdom.

With the help of her daughter Miriam, she laid her baby amid the flowering flags near the river's bank and left this young girl near by to watch over her little brother. What could have calmed a mother's heart in an hour like this but prayer? And surely she had taught her daughter Miriam to pray also as she watched. Though Miriam deserves great credit, she was the pupil; Jochebed was the teacher. She bore the larger responsibility. She it was who remembered that Pharaoh's daughter was accustomed to come down and bathe at this very spot.

Before she came, the baby Moses may have lain in his handmade ark for several hours. Who knows? We can be sure of one thing. Jochebed was standing near by with a trusting faith that made her know her baby would come to no harm; and her faith was rewarded.

Pharaoh's daughter did appear with her maidens to bathe, right near the spot where the little Moses lay in the reeds. When she came upon the ark partly hidden by the flags, she sent her maid to fetch it (Exod. 2:5). Then she heard the whimpering child, and turning to her maiden she said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children" (Exod. 2:6).

The young Miriam, standing not far away, said, "Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?" (Exod. 2:7). "And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, Go" (Exod. 2:8). How much action and exhilaration and triumph resulted from that one word "Go."

So it was that Jochebed, standing not too far away probably, received the joyful news that she could nurse her own child. Though Moses was soon adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, it was his own mother Jochebed who would watch over him until he was seven. Can we not trace in the peculiarly gentle character of Moses the influence of this devout mother? The whole character of Moses displays her holy guidance. She it was who instilled in him a belief in God, Creator of heaven and earth, of man and beast. She it was who imparted to him the sacred traditions of Israel and who told him of the divine promise to Abraham and his descendants that they would become a great nation. She it was who had him alone at night and rocked him to sleep, and during the day she could watch over him as he romped and played inside Pharaoh's palace.

And yet this lowly Levite mother could rejoice that her son Moses, as the adopted son of the princess, would receive the best education available in a king's palace and could later have the privilege of boys of highest rank, probably an education at Heliopolis, the Oxford of ancient Egypt. What other Hebrew son could be so blessed? What other mother could know such inward joy?

In later years, when the priests of Egypt would try to initiate her son into idolatry, he would remember his mother's God and her faith in Him. And he would remain a Hebrew at heart through all the years of his life. We can be quite certain that it was his mother's early influence that enabled Moses to make the decision to leave the court and go out among his own brethren and lift their burden, for from her he had inherited loyalty to his own race.

Whether Jochebed lived to see this or not, we have no record. By the time her son was seven years old, she had disappeared from the record. Probably she went back to the obscurity of her own humble home to watch Moses' progress from afar. We do not know whether she saw him become a great leader, lawgiver, and prophet but we do know she had had the satisfaction of pouring great things into his mind and heart during those most formative years of his life. And we know, too, that this mother of faith had instilled even greater faith in Moses and also in her two other children, Miriam and Aaron.

ZIPPORAH

Daughter of Jethro, a priest in Midian. Meets Moses when she and her seven sisters are tending their father's sheep. She has two sons by Moses and circumcizes one herself when her husband becomes ill. Spends little time with Moses after he goes into Egypt. Finally has reunion with him after he has become a great leader of Hebrew people.

EXOD. 2:21; 4:25; 18:2

WIFE OF MOSES, THE GREAT LAWGIVER

THOUGH her husband Moses is one of the greatest leaders of all time, Zipporah herself is an example of one of the Bible's undistinguished wives. In only three passages is she called by name, and these are brief. The seven words spoken by her lead us to believe she was a woman of violent temper who had little sympathy with the religious convictions of her distinguished husband.

Though her name means "bird," not even that gives us any indication of her character. She came from a Midian background (Exod. 2:16). Her father Jethro was a priest. What god Jethro worshiped we can only conjecture. We have reason to believe that he later became a believer in Moses' Jehovah, for Jethro later professed to Moses, "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods" (Exod. 18:11). We have no such expression of faith from his daughter Zipporah.

She was one of seven daughters and met Moses in the land of Midian soon after he fled there because he had slain an Egyptian who was smiting a Hebrew, one of his own brethren (Exod. 2:11). Zipporah and her sisters, who had been tending their fathers sheep, had come with their flocks to draw water at the well. Other shepherds drove the flocks of the seven sisters away, but Moses was a courteous shepherd. He gave water to the sisters' sheep.

And they went and told their father, who offered Moses the hospitality of his house. Zipporah's marriage to Moses after that is recorded briefly in seven words (Exod. 2:21). The romantic element found in the wooing of both Isaac and Jacob is not there. Soon afterward we find Moses engrossed in the woes of his people. His wife does not seem to play a part in either his lofty plans or his tremendous hardships.

From Zipporah's brief record, we know that she had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. And when Moses started back from Midian to the Land of Egypt, his wife and his sons set forth with him, they on an ass and Moses walking, his rod in his hand. A picture this is of a humble family, whose head was destined to become Israel's great prophet, lawgiver, and leader.

When they halted at an inn for the night, Moses became very ill. The narrative here is obscure, but something was troubling him. He became so ill that his life was in danger. Though records do not furnish actual historical details, again we can only conjecture that he was troubled because his wife, a Midianite, had refused to allow the circumcision of their sons, a symbol of the covenant between God and His people. And Moses, now called by God to the leadership of his people, was troubled because he had neglected the sacred duty of circumcision, which was not practiced by his wife's people.

We can assume that the delay in circumcision was due to Zipporah's prejudices. When she saw her husband so violently ill, she doubtless believed God was angered with him because he had not circumcised his son. She then seized a piece of flint and circumcised her son herself. Which son that was and how old he was, there is no record. Jewish tradition says it was the second son Eliezer. Though there are difficulties with this primitive story in its present form, one point seems quite clear. Moses and Zipporah were not congenial companions. No doubt their disagreement was due to the fact that she was a Midianite and he a Hebrew, and they had different views.

After the circumcision incident Zipporah becomes a nonentity. What part she played in Moses' life, again, we cannot be sure. She had so little in common with her husband that at the most trying and noble period of his life, on his mission to Pharaoh, he probably had to send her back home. However, it may be that she and her sons did accompany Moses to Egypt and remain with him there, and after the Exodus, when Moses' people were slowly approaching Mount Sinai, Zipporah and her sons may have been sent ahead to visit Jethro and tell of all that God had done for Moses and the Israelites.

Zipporah is mentioned for the last time when she and her sons and father Jethro have joined Moses at Mount Horeb (Exod. 18:5). Jethro acts as spokesman for the entire family. Most of the text centers around him, while Zipporah is only among those present.

Later we find Miriam and Aaron taking issue with their brother Moses because of his Cushite wife. The text of Numbers 12:1 would lead us to believe Zipporah had died and Moses had married a second time. Some scholars, however, believe that Zipporah and the Cushite were the same person. A phrase in Habakkuk 3:7 indicates that this could be true.

Though interpretations regarding incidents of Zipporah's life vary, there is one conclusion we may quite confidently draw from all of them. Zipporah seems to have been a woman who was prejudiced and rebellious. To neither her husband nor her sons did she leave a legacy of spiritual riches.

MIRIAM

Guards brother Moses until Pharaoh's daughter finds him. Leads women of Israel as they sing and dance after safely crossing Sea of Reeds. Later opposes Moses about his wife, also is jealous of Moses. Is stricken with leprosy; Moses heals her. Later she dies at Kadesh.

Exod. 15:20, 21

NUM. 12:1, 4, 5, 10, 15 20:1; 26:59

DEUT. 24:9

I CHRON. 6:3 Mic. 6:4

"SING UNTO THE LORD"

MIRIAM is the first woman in the Bible whose interest was national and whose mission was patriotic. When she led the women of Israel in that oldest of all national anthems, "Sing Unto the Lord," four centuries of bondage in Egypt had been lifted. It was a turning point in Israel's religious development and a woman led in its recognition.

The portrait of Miriam, brilliant, courageous sister of Moses, is drawn in a few graphically real strokes. We have the first picture of her in Exodus 2:4, 7 when she was a little girl. Here she is not named, but is referred to only as Moses' sister. Her courage at this time gives an indication of the kind of woman she was to become.

As she stood guarding her baby brother in the ark made by their mother Jochebed, she exhibited a fearlessness and self-possession unusual in a little girl. She was then probably about seven years old. Though she was awaiting the coming of a powerful princess, the daughter of a hostile tyrant who had decreed that all male babies should be destroyed, Miriam showed poise, intelligence, and finesse. When the daughter of Pharaoh came down with her maidens to the banks of the Nile to bathe and found the little Moses lying there in his ark, Miriam approached her quietly, asking if she would like her to find a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby.

Never disclosing by look or word her own relationship to the child, she brought her mother Jochebed to Pharaoh's daughter. The child Moses was safe at last behind palace walls, with his own mother as his nurse.

Through the years that passed, while Moses was in Pharaoh's house, and during the subsequent period when he had left the scene of courtly splendor to live some forty years in Midian, the Bible gives us no record of Miriam. There is also no record of her during Moses' long pleadings with Pharaoh to release his people, so that they might return to the land of their fathers.

Through the long oppression of the Israelites by hard taskmasters, we can be sure that Miriam was ministering to her people and that she was revered as the honored sister of Moses and Aaron, who were to lead the Hebrews out of bondage and form a new nation. The prophet Micah attests to this when he says, "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam" (Mic. 6:4).

The second scene in Miriam's life opens when Israel's deliverance is at hand. Wondrous miracles attesting to the mighty mission of her illustrious brothers had unfolded, and thousands of Hebrew people were departing from Egypt.

Miriam now occupied a unique place among the Hebrew women, that of prophetess. The Hebrew word "prophetess" means a woman who is inspired to teach the will of God. It is also used for wife of a prophet, and is sometimes applied to a singer of hymns. The first meaning must be applied to Miriam because the Bible gives no record that she was ever married. Tradition has it that she became the wife of Hur, who with Aaron held up the hands of Moses, but we have no warrant whatever in Scripture, by direct word or inference, to confirm this tradition.

The next scene depicts Miriam in all her triumph. A strong wind had backed up the waters of the Sea of Reeds, and Miriam led the Hebrew women across the dry sea bottom. Following hard upon them came Pharaoh's detachments of chariots and horsemen. But the sea came flooding back and they were swallowed up in the water. We can see Miriam as a commanding figure, her face radiant in this hour of her people's deliverance. She and the women following behind her moved forward on dry ground through the midst of the sea when the waters were a wall on their right hand and on their left. Miriam played on a timbrel and danced joyfully as she led the song: "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" (Exod. 15:21).

This Song of Deliverance, sometimes referred to as the Song of Miriam and Moses, is one of the earliest songs in Hebrew literature, and one of the finest. What part Miriam had in the composition of this national anthem, the oldest on record, is not known, but in weaving it into the conscious life of her people she had an equal share with Moses and Aaron.

Miriam is the first woman singer on record. The wonder of it is that she sang unto the Lord, using her great gift for the elevation of her people. With her they exulted over their escape from their enemies. And with freedom came a newly discovered faith and confidence in God. This was Miriam's great hour. She was the new Israel's most renowned woman, and her people held her in high regard. She had filled an important role in the founding of the Hebrew commonwealth.

The third scene in Miriam's life offers a sharp contrast to this one, and occurs some time later. Some chronologists believe it took place only one year after the passage across the Sea of Reeds, but this period seems hardly long enough for Miriam's character to have changed so completely. Miriam has had a spiritual fall-and over what we would least expect. She has spoken against her brother Moses.

The limitations in Miriam's character come into clear focus in this third dramatic scene in her life. No longer does she stand on the summit as she did in her triumphant hour. She is still an exalted person, but no longer a leader in exultation. This time she is a leader in jealousy and bitterness. Probably she had become rebellious because her place was secondary to that of her brother Moses.

With Aaron, we hear her murmuring, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it" (Num. 12:2). In this delineation of the envious, bitter side of Miriam's character, following so soon after the courageous, inspiring scene of the woman who had sung to God so joyfully, we have one of the most perfect examples in the Bible of woman's mixed nature of good and evil.

Another reason for Miriam's conflict with her brother Moses had arisen. He had married again. His first wife Zipporah, a Midianite, had died. His second wife was a Cushite (Ethiopian), a dark-skinned woman from the African country bordering on Egypt. Opinions vary about this woman. Some scholars think that Moses married only once.

It is probable that Miriam, older than Moses by about seven years, had expressed herself quite freely against her brother's wife from an idolatrous country. That an Ethiopian should be raised above herself, who was a daughter of Israel, was, to one of her evidently proud spirit, unendurable. Because she had such pride in her own race, she may have told Moses that he should have chosen his wife from among his own people. Her great mistake was that she made her complaint public. It tended to break down the authority of Moses and to imperil the hope of the Israelites.

On the other hand, she rang a warning bell to others who might follow Moses' lead. When a man's wife is opposed to the religion of his country, especially the wife of a man occupying the lofty position of Moses, his cause is in peril. And Miriam evidently feared this. She was not alone in her thinking. Aaron was a partner in the complaint, but Miriam's name was placed first. Probably it was she who brought up the matter to Aaron and influenced his thinking. There is a peculiar analogy between Miriam's sin and her punishment. The foul vice of envy had spread over her whole character, like the loathsome disease which had overtaken her. Her sharp words made more real the words James spoke many centuries later: "And the tongue is a fire, . . . it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature" (Jas. 3:6).

Leprosy, the pale plague of Egypt regarded as providential punishment for slander, had smitten Miriam down. She had become a leper "white as snow" (Num. 12:10). "And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee" (Num. 12:13). Though she had held a grudge against him, Moses acted toward her in a spirit of love. Probably when he saw his sister leprous, he remembered that he had once been stricken with leprosy, too (Exod. 4:6).

We can assume that the heart of Miriam was touched by her brother's love. Though she was shut out of camp for seven days, in accordance with the regulations of the Israelites (Num. 12:15), she was not shut out of the hearts of those she had led in their triumphant hour. Though wearied from their long wanderings and impatient at every delay in reaching the Promised Land, "the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again" (Num. 12:15). Doubtless the leprosy of Miriam's mind departed with the leprosy of her body.

The fourth and final scene in Miriam's story takes place at Kadesh, probably in the Wilderness of Zin, some seventy miles south of Hebron. Tradition tells us that after her death her funeral was celebrated in the most solemn manner for thirty days. Like her brothers Aaron and Moses,

Miriam did not reach the Promised Land but died in the wilderness; however, her cry of exultation, "Sing unto the Lord," which had signified freedom for the newborn Israel, could not die.

DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD

Five daughters declare their rights to the property of their father Zelophehad, on his death. Case brought before Moses and fair decision handed down. It is reviewed later and restrictions are put on Israel daughter who marries into another tribe.

Num. 26:33 27:1 36:11 JOSH. 17:3

THEY DECLARED THEIR RIGHTS

IN THE ancient Near East, up until about 3,500 years ago, women had no property rights. If a father died leaving no sons, his ,s daughters did not inherit what he left.

The first women to declare their rights on the death of their father were the five daughters of Zelophehad: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. Their father, a Manassite, had died in the wilderness, and the daughters explained that he was not in the company of Korah, who had rebelled against Moses. Because their father had not died therefore for any cause that doomed their family or their inheritance, they declared they were clearly entitled to what he had left.

This happened at a critical time with Israel. A new census had , been made, preparatory to an entrance into the Promised Land. The new land would be distributed according to the census taken before Israel departed from Egypt for the Promised Land.

The daughters of Zelophehad had been numbered among all those in the tribes who either were twenty years of age or would be twenty by the time the land actually was distributed. But they knew that under existing customs they would have no property rights, either now or in the new land. Probably their father had been a man of means. What did they do?

They marched before Moses, the priest Eleazar, and the congregation and stated their case publicly. "Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father" (Num. 27:4).

In order to be fair in the settling of the daughters' case, Moses went before God, a God of justice and right. And the great lawgiver came back and declared, "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them" (Num. 27:7).

Moses wrote a new law which stated: "If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter" (Num. 27:8). As a result of this decision, the case was broadened to include other instances, such as when there were no children left and no brothers either to succeed the deceased.

The daughters of Zelophehad had filed one of the earliest reported lawsuits on record. Jurists still turn to it for opinions and have declared it the oldest decided case "that is still cited as an authority." In the American Bar Association *Journal* of February, 1924, there appears an article by Henry C. Clark in which this decision of the daughters of Zelophehad is quoted. It is described as an "early declaratory judgment in which the property rights of women marrying outside of their tribe are clearly set forth."

The decision handed down in this time of Moses was a great victory for these five daughters. At last a woman had rights, because these five had declared theirs and had had the courage to fight their case through with the authorities. Up until now women had had no legal property rights. That is one of the reasons a man always desired a son. Now women were numbered as human beings and legally entitled to the same property rights as men. The judgment which had been passed for the daughters of Zelophehad became law among the twelve tribes of Israel.

Other complications, however, soon arose. The fathers of Israel looked into the future. What if daughters married outside their own tribes? This would seriously threaten the tenure of the land in Israel. The land would go to their children, who on their father's side might belong to another tribe. This would confuse families and complicate interests.

The men of Israel called for a rehearing of the case, stating their point clearly in Numbers 36:3. The case was reviewed. The decision is given in Numbers 36:5-9. The gist of it was that the daughters of Zelophehad could marry whomever they chose, provided they married within the family of their father's tribe, probably some of their cousins. This applied, however, only to daughters who were heiresses.

A new, fairer, and broader law had been enacted, and it provided for a balance of power among the tribes.

The five daughters of Zelophehad-Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah-had declared their rights and had won a court decision that legal courts accept as law to this day.

RAHAB

Two spies from Israel's army make their way to harlot's house on city walls o f Jericho. She promises to conceal them and aid in approaching battle between her people and Joshua's army, because she believes firmly in their God. She hides spies in flax on her roof-top. She and her family saved when walls of Jericho fall.

JOSH. 2:1, 3; 6:17, 23, 25 HEB. 11:31

JAS. 2:25

WOMAN OF FAITH WHO AIDED JOSHUA'S ARMY

BUILT over the gap between the two walls of Jericho was the house of a woman identified in both the Old and the New Testament as Rahab, the harlot. This ancient "City of Palms," as it was known, was surrounded by two walls. According to recent archaeological findings, there was a space of twelve to fifteen feet between them. Houses of sun-dried brick were built over the gap between the two walls and supported by timbers laid from one wall to the other, or by small cross walls of brick. Rahab's house was in one of these strategic points, and her window looked on the outer wall.

Because of its advantageous location her house attracted the attention of two spies from Shittim. They represented the Israelite army of Joshua, who had succeeded Moses as the leader of Israel on its long journey from Egypt to Canaan. Joshua had made plans to advance on Jericho, which commanded entrance to Palestine from the east.

Down the hills from Shittim, from the eastern edge of the Jordan Valley, had come these two travelers. It is easy to imagine that they were young and walked with authority, their long, flowing robes swaying as they pressed forward with quick steps. Eager to avoid notice, they mixed with the crowds outside the wall, surreptitiously keeping their gaze on the structure of the massive walls protecting Jericho, key city to the rich Jordan Valley.

The walls represented the city's greatest strength, and not until they were breached or destroyed could the army of Israel move inside the city. The house of the harlot Rahab stood upon the walls and so it was that the spies hastened to it.

Probably city authorities frequently saw unfamiliar characters going in and out of the house of this woman, and they would not question these two strangers. The character of the woman was, of course, of no consequence to spies on a secret mission.

Interpreters differ as to the real character of Rahab. One source brings up the point that Rahab and her household were escorted to safety "without" the camp of Israel (Josh. 6:23). This "without" has special significance, for the camp of Israel was "holy" and no "unclean" person was allowed to enter. This would seem to indicate that Rahab was indeed a harlot.

Rahab and her family, however, finally were received into Israel, apparently by marriage. Jewish tradition makes her the wife of Joshua. Another tradition has it that she became the wife of Prince Salmon, who could have been one of the spies who appealed to her for aid. If so, she became the mother of Boaz, who married Ruth' and their son Obed bore Jesse, the father of King David, through whose line is traced the Christ.

In the genealogy of Christ (Matt. 1:5) we find the name of Rachab, along with names of three other women, Ruth, Tamar (Tamar), and Bathsheba. There is some question as to whether this was Rahab, the harlot, but most scholars identify Rachab and Rahab as one and the same person.

Josephus and some of the rabbis refer to Rahab not as a harlot but as an innkeeper, to whose house the spies went for lodging (Josh. 2:1). One source stresses the point that persons who kept inns in these early times—this was about the fourteenth century B.C., according to W. F. Albright—were not always the most moral persons. Sometimes they were all called harlots.

The earliest Mosaic laws protested against harlotry. Its social curse was known to Jesus, but when the woman taken in adultery, for example, was brought before him by the scribes and Pharisees, he turned the searchlight upon their own self-righteousness, rather than upon the unfortunate victim of commercialized vice (John 8:1-11). On more than one occasion Christ, in an effort to correct hypocrisy, said that even harlots would enter the kingdom before those whose works appeared more pious than they actually were (Matt. 21:31).

We have evidence that Rahab lied. When her own king ordered her to bring out the men that were seen to enter her house, she answered, "There came men unto me, but I wist not whence they were" (Josh. 2:4). At that moment they were hiding inside her house.

But what Rahab was is not of as much consequence as what she became. The Bible deals with human beings in search of God. Many of them are far from perfect, but among the greatest are those who, like King David, rose above their wrongdoings and became godly despite them. Even though Rahab was called a harlot, she later became a woman of such faith that she could declare to the enemy, "The Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Josh. 2:11).

The Book of Hebrews enrolls Rahab among the faithful along with Sarah. These are the only two women mentioned by name in the famous roll call of the faithful. The harlot Rahab is commended because by faith she "perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace" (Heb. 11:31). James, speaking of how character can be transformed, says, "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?" (Jas. 2:25). Other qualities in Rahab's character are quite evident from the Scripture. She was an industrious woman. She wove fine linen and dried the flax on her roof-top. It was among the stalks of flax drying in the sun that she hid the spies until after nightfall, when the city gates were closed. Then she let them down from the outside wall by a cord from her window, probably a heavy rope of linen she had woven herself.

Rahab, we also know, had a deep devotion to her family and friends. She was clever and alert as well. She had an agreement with the spies whom she was aiding that she would use the same scarlet cord by which they would be let down from the walls of Jericho. During the battle this red cord would designate her house to the army of Joshua and guarantee it protection. It was agreed that all of her family, in order to be safe, must remain indoors with her during the attack.

Rahab also must have been very courageous to be willing to risk her own life in order to protect enemy spies whom she believed to be on a godly mission. She had heard of the Israelite crossing of the Sea of Reeds, when the waters parted before them, also of their victories over the Amorites. So strongly did she believe in the Israelite cause that she could say confidently to enemy spies, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you" (Josh. 2:9).

Word soon spread among the people of Israel that God would fight for them. A woman living in a house on the city wall had made it possible for Joshua to march forward. And he had led his men, not by might but by strength in the living God, sending the ark of the Covenant and the priests along with the advance guard.

The walls of Jericho fell and the city burned and Joshua declared, "The city shall be accursed, even it, and all that are therein, to the Lord: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that are with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent" (Josh. 6:17).

While the city was in flames, Rahab and her family departed from it. They were saved from the total destruction of their city because Rahab the harlot had been willing to prove her faith as well as to declare it.

DEBORAH

Wife of the obscure Lapidoth, she becomes a woman of great power. She awakens the people in a period of lethargy. With Barak, she leads them to victory. The martial song celebrating her triumph is one of the greatest in history.

Judg. 4:4, 5, 9, 10, 14 5:1,7,12, 15

"IS NOT THE LORD GONE OUT BEFORE THEE ?"

THE only woman in the Bible who was placed at the height of political power by the common consent of the people was Deborah. Though she lived in the time of the "Judges," some thirteen centuries before Christ, there are few women in history who have ever attained the public dignity and supreme authority of Deborah. She was like Joan of Arc, who twenty-seven centuries later rode in front of the French and led them to victory.

Deborah was the wife of an obscure man named Lapidoth. The rabbis say she was a keeper of the tabernacle lamps. If so, what a wonderful yet humble task for this woman who was to become so great in Israel! Later, when her faith in God became the strength Israel, she would become the keeper of a new spiritual vision that would light all Israel.

In all of her roles, first that of counselor to her people, next as judge in their disputes, and finally as deliverer in time of war, Deborah exhibited womanly excellence. She was indeed "a mother in Israel." She arose to great leadership because she trusted God implicitly and because she could inspire in others that same trust. For twenty years Jabin, king of Canaan, had oppressed the children of Israel. Their vineyards had been destroyed, their women dishonored, and their children slain. Many had turned to the worship of idols.

Deborah's story comes in the first part of the book of Judges. These men were more than judges in today's meaning of the term, for they were chieftains and heroes as well, and their influence was felt mainly in war. Long before Deborah became a leader in war, she was a homemaker. Her house was on the road between Ramah and Beth-el, in the hill country of Ephraim, where flourished olive and palm trees. It was under one of the most royal of date palms that she would sit and give counsel to the people who came to her.

As a counselor in time of peace, Deborah became known far and near, but her greatest service came in time of war. And she led her people into war. Most of them had stood by fearfully because they were afraid of the enemy's 900 chariots of iron, when they had none. While they paled with fear, Deborah burned with indignation at the oppression of her people. A gifted and an intrepid woman, she felt a call to rise up against such fear and complacency, for she carried in her heart the great hope that God would come to her people's rescue if they would honor Him.

Because the men of Israel had faltered in leadership, Deborah arose to denounce this lack of leadership and to affirm that deliverance from oppression was at hand. Her religious zeal and patriotic fervor armed her with new strength. She became the magnificent personification of the free spirit of the people of Israel.

We can imagine that Deborah looked the part of a great and noble woman. She must have had fire in her eyes, determination in her step, and a positive ring to her voice. We can see her, a tall, handsome woman, wearing a dress of blue crash striped in red and yellow and a yellow turban with a long, pure-white cotton veil, lace edged, reaching to the hem of her dress. A feminine woman, who never had had the ambition to push herself forward, Deborah better personified the homemaker in Israel than a warrior. But as she counseled with her people and began to sense their common danger, she kindled in them an enthusiasm for immediate action against the enemy.

She had the courage to summon one of Israel's most capable military men, Barak, from his home in Kedesh. Together they worked out a plan for action against the enemy. Deborah let Barak know she was not afraid of Sisera, commander of Jabin's army; neither was she afraid of his 900 chariots. She made him feel that the spirit that could animate an army was greater than either weapons or fortifications. Probably she recalled to him that God had led the Israelites through the Sea of Reeds and had broken a mighty oppressor, Pharaoh. And she made Barak realize that God, who had proved Himself to be mightier than Pharaoh, also was mightier than either Jabin or Sisera.

"Go," spoke Deborah positively to the fainthearted Barak, "and draw toward mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men of the children of Naphtali and of the children of Zebulun" (Judg. 4:6). And she convinced Barak that the Lord would deliver Sisera and his chariots and multitudes into their hands.

Barak, sensing the spiritual insight that Deborah possessed and feeling the urgent need for her presence and spiritual counsel, answered, "If thou wilt go with me, then I will go; but if thou wilt not go with me, then I will not go" (Judg. 4:8). That is one of the most unusual passages in the Bible spoken by a man to a woman. It demonstrates a general's great confidence in a woman, a home body, too, who had risen to a high place in Israel largely because of one quality, her abiding faith in God.

Without hesitation, the stouthearted Deborah declared triumphantly, "I will surely go with thee; notwithstanding the journey that thou takest shall not be for thine honour; for the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judg. 4:9). In these words Deborah demonstrated more than leadership. Her people were to discover that she was also a prophet.

In Judges 4:9 we learn that "Deborah arose, and went with Barak to Kedesh." That one word "arose" best explains her positive action. She did not sit at home and ponder the matter when the time came for action, but she arose, believing firmly that she was armed with strength from God.

When Barak summoned his tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, he saw that none was well armed and none rode in chariots. But Deborah's faith carried the Israelites forward unafraid. When she and Barak and their ten thousand men came to the spur of the hills, near where Sisera and his charioteers were, Deborah, looking out from a lofty rock, exclaimed to Barak, "Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: is not the Lord gone out before thee?" (Judg. 4:14).

We learn directly from Josephus and indirectly from the song of Deborah that a storm of sleet and hail burst over the plain from the east, driving right into the face of Sisera and his men and charioteers. The slingers and archers were disabled by the beating rain, and the swordsmen were crippled by the biting cold.

Deborah and Barak and their forces had the storm behind them and were not crippled by it. As they saw the storm lash the enemy, they pushed on, believing all the more in providential aid. The flood waters were now racing down the Kishon River. So violent was the rain that Sisera's heavy iron chariots sank deep in the mud, and as they did, many of the charioteers were slain. And the hoofs of the cavalry horses splashed through the mud as a small remnant made its retreat.

Sisera, abandoning his mighty chariot, ran for his life through the blinding rain. He managed to reach the tent of Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite. Because the Kenites had been at peace with Sisera, he thought that here he would be safe, especially since Jael had come forth to offer him her hospitality. Weary from battle and comforted by the warm milk and lodging which Jael had so hospitably given to him, Sisera fell soundly asleep.

And as Sisera lay sleeping Jael took a peg which her husband had used to stretch the tents on the ground and with a hammer drove it into Sisera's temples.

Hot in pursuit of Sisera, Barak soon came to the tent of Jael. She went out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will shew thee the man whom thou seekest" (Judg. 4:22). And Jael took him into the tent where lay the dead Sisera. It was just as Deborah had prophesied: "For the Lord shall sell Sisera into the hand of a woman" (Judg. 4:9).

To celebrate this great victory the Ode of Deborah, one of the earliest martial songs in history, was composed. It began: "Praise ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel" (Judg. 5:2). Deborah took no credit to herself. She gave all the credit to God, for she knew that only He could cause the earth to tremble, the heavens to drop torrents of water, and the mountains to melt. In the song she is called "a mother in Israel," for she, like a mother, had led the panicky children of Israel to victory. Their cry to her to lead them echoes in the refrain: "Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song." The tribes of Israel who had stood by her in the conflict were praised.

Tribute is paid to Jael for putting Sisera to death. In every line of the song one senses Deborah's extreme devotion to God and to the well-being of her nation. At the end of the song, which runs through thirty-one verses of Judges 5, her courageous voice sounds forth like the clear notes of a trumpet of freedom. Her people were no longer enslaved. Now with her they could declare, "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." Such fire as Deborah possessed literally never died out of Israel.

Her glorious victory is best recorded in these concluding but meaningful lines of her Bible biography: "And the land had rest forty years" (Judg. 5:31).

JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER

Jephthah, ninth judge of Israel, makes public vow to offer a burnt offering in case of victory. He is victorious, but learns his daughter must be his offering. She accepts her father's pledge with meekness and patience.

Judg. 11:34, 35, 40

EXAMPLE OF NOBLE SUBMISSION

SCARCELY a century had elapsed since Deborah's great victory. The people freed by her were now plunged into idolatry and threatened by foreign domination again. In the darkness of this era the figures of a father and daughter, his only child, emerge as the providential agents of restoration.

The daughter had such a sublime reverence for a promise made to God that she was even willing to lay down her life for it. The father, Jephthah, described as "a mighty man of valour" (Judg. 11:1), was the son of a distinguished Hebrew named Gilead, who lived in a territory of that name. His mother was a stranger to the tribe, an inferior woman described as a harlot (Judg. 11:1, 2). Despite his mother's foreign blood and the heathen qualities of many of his tribesmen, Jephthah became a great commander and a believer in the one God.

In the early part of his life, because of his illegitimacy, he had been banished from his father's house and had taken up his residence in Tob, not far from Gilead. Here he became head of a warring tribe of freebooters who went raiding with him. When war broke out between the Ammonites and the Gileadites, the latter sought Jephthah as their commander. He consented only after a solemn covenant, ratified on both sides at Mizpeh, a strongly fortified frontier town of Gilead.

Here he established his residence temporarily and brought his daughter. After a fruitless appeal for peace to their leaders and for aid to the adjacent tribe of Ephraim, Jephthah, urged by the "spirit of the Lord," sped through the territories of Manasseh and his own Gilead, summoning the Israelites to arms.

It seems that his army represented a small minority compared to that of the enemy. In his perplexity to give fresh courage to his troops and to sustain his own confidence against such fearful odds, he made a vow publicly to the Lord. In that reckless vow he exhibited a rude and unenlightened piety typical of the wild mountaineer fighter that he was when he declared, "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then shall it be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (Judg. 11:30-31).

What a contrast between Jephthah's vow and that of Hannah who had pledged to lend her child to God as long as he lived. What a contrast, also, to the simple and sublime trust of Deborah, who went against a fearful enemy strongly armed with faith in God. Not so strongly armed, Jephthah was willing to make any kind of promise to insure victory.

Jephthah routed the Ammonites, and twenty of their cities fell before him. Elated with his unexpected success, he hurried to Mizpeh, where he had left his daughter. The women and maidens had assembled to greet this victorious warrior with songs and dances. Who should be the first to come out from Jephthah's own doorway but his beloved daughter! Probably he had thought a servant or hound dog would precede her. Or maybe not until this moment had he stopped to realize how rash and cruel had been his vow. But now his shock was great and his distress poignant as he looked and saw his beautiful daughter standing there in front of his own doorway.

Let us visualize her in all the freshness of youth, with her luxuriant hair falling loosely over her shoulders, and with the wind blowing her hair and at the same time swaying her full-skirted and brightly colored dress. Her red lips were probably parted in a radiant smile and her eyes were filled with joy as she beat a timbrel and sang. Her country was free again. The enemy had been annihilated, and her own father had been in command. Now he would be first in Israel.

She ran to embrace him. Had he not been all in all to her? Born in exile, reared amid the wild scenes of desert life, she had known no other protection but her father's tent, no greater love than his. And we can be sure that, mighty warrior though he was, whose name had spread panic throughout all neighboring lands, he had been to beloved daughter the tenderest kind of parent.

While the whole land echoed the triumphant shouts of freedom, ? all the glory died out for Jephthah as he embraced his daughter, only to cry loudly, "Alas, my daughter! thou has brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth: unto the Lord, and I cannot go back" (Judg. 11:35).

With heroic courage Jephthah's daughter gave the answer that has become a classic: "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto

the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon" (Judg. 11:36). His daughter's noble submission to his vow now made the consequence of it even harder for Jephthah to bear.

Pure of heart and unmindful of tragedy, Jephthah's daughter probably did not at first grasp her father's distressing predicament. Then she began to know that the life she had envisioned as a wife and mother, the hope of every woman in Israel, was gone. Let us imagine she needed spiritual strength to face such a crisis and so she asked her father for two months, so that she might go to the mountains with young friends and "bewail her virginity" (Judg. 11:38).

Then it was she returned calmly and obediently to her father, who, the Scriptures say, "did with her according to his vow" (Judg. 11:39). A great many Bible commentators take this story literally, saying Jephthah did go forth and offer his daughter for a burnt offering. There is little argument for a different interpretation except in that earlier phrase, "shall surely be the Lord's" (Judg. 11:31), indicating he could have meant to offer her to the service of the sanctuary.

Some commentators make the point that while Jephthah's daughter was in the mountains for two months her father had time to weigh with himself the rashness of his promise. And, despite the turbulent times, there were in Israel many noble, God-fearing men and women who intelligently understood and practiced the wise and merciful system of Moses, that of not offering human beings as burnt sacrifices. If so, Jephthah's daughter gave her life to service in the tabernacle. The phrase "she knew no man" (Judg. 11:39) conveys the thought that she became a celibate. It has been suggested that what the daughters of Israel bewailed was not her death but her celibacy.

We are positive that she did not marry and bear children, and for an only child of a mighty warrior to die unmarried and leave a name in Israel extinguished was indeed a heavy judgment. But despite the seeming tragedy of this daughter of Israel, she lives on, even now, almost thirty-one centuries later, as the embodiment of a courageous young woman who was both meek in spirit and patient in suffering.

DELILAH

A woman representing the Philistines, enemies to Samson's Hebrew race, inveigles and betrays him for money paid by enemy. Learning that his strength is in his hair, she has it shaved off. He awakens to find strength gone.

JUDG, 16:4, 6, 10, 12, 13, 18

"ENTICE HIM AND SEE WHERE HIS STRENGTH LIES"

DELILAH typifies the terrible energy of evil in a woman just as Samson typifies the preternatural strength in a man. She has come down through these thirty-one centuries as the woman who, in an insidious manner, sought to destroy a man who seemed to be unconquerable.

The rabbis generally concede that Delilah was a Philistine, and Josephus declares her to have been one. Samson, one of the most eminent Hebrew "Judges," had to his credit many heroic achievements against the Philistines. They hated him and sought to work his ruin through Delilah.

She lived, we are told, in the Valley of Sorek, a brook valley which cut through the foothills between the Philistine plains and the highlands of Judah. When Samson went down to see Delilah, he had already demonstrated that he was a giant in physical strength but that when it came to women he was a dwarf in willpower and moral resistance.

Shortly before going down to see Delilah he had visited a harlot. The Bible text relates this quite casually in judges 16:1, as if Samson had a low sense of morals. Earlier than this, he had been married to a woman living at Timnath, a daughter of the Philistines. She turned out to be a weeping and inconstant wife (Judg. 14:17, 20). While Samson was away, she was courted by his friend. Samson's mother and father Manoah, a godly pair, had objected to the marriage of their son, who from the womb had been consecrated to God (Judg. 13:5). His wife did not believe in the one God. But when Samson's parents expressed their objection to her, he answered them saying, "She pleaseth me well" (Judg. 14:3).

Though victimized by these two seductive women, Samson started courting Delilah, who turned out to be the worst of the three. When he came into her presence, he became a slave to passion. And he let himself forget that his paramour was a Philistine in sympathy, while he had consecrated his life to deliver Israel out of the hands of the Philistines. He was blind to the fact that Delilah was a woman who finally would lure him to his ruin, and all for 1,100 pieces of silver from each of the lords of the Philistines.

We can be sure that Delilah possessed a fascinating quality and had an exotic kind of beauty. Though the Bible gives us no exact details of this or of what she wore, she undoubtedly decked herself in her finest clothes when an eminent man like Samson called. Probably she wore a dress embroidered with gold threads from Ophir and colored threads dyed with Tyrian dyes. In her ears and on her ankles, fingers, and toes she wore gold jewelry.

It is likely that she also used perfumes from India, and she made of her home a charming and restful place. We can imagine that she had musicians playing the dulcimer and lyre on the garden terrace, where a fountain sprayed, cooling the area. Her home probably had become a frequent retreat for the eminent and mighty Samson.

He was completely blind to the fact that Delilah was a deceitful woman, determined to find out the secret of his great strength so that his enemies could conquer him. One day while she was alone with Samson, she boldly asked him, "Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth, and wherewith thou mightest be bound to afflict thee" (Judg. 16:6). She spoke in jest, as if to make him believe that no man could bind him. He replied, pretending to reveal the means by which she might test his invincible strength. But each time he tricked her. This became a game to them, she coaxing him to tell her the source of his strength, and he giving her a series of wrong explanations.

Day after day, during their lovemaking, she pressed him hard for the answer. Finally one day Samson confessed to her the secret of his strength, which, he said, was in the locks of his hair. If they were shaved, he told her, his strength would leave him and he would be like any other man. He revealed to her that even before his birth he had been consecrated to God and he had kept the Nazarite vows, one of which was that his hair would not be cut.

When he told Delilah all that was in his heart, she made him fall asleep on her knee. And as he slept, she called for a man to shave the seven locks from his head.

When he awoke, he discovered too late that Delilah had deceived him. She was not a tender lover but a cruel enemy. "The Philistines be upon thee, Samson" (Judg. 16:20), she said as she awoke him. And Samson knew that his strength had gone from him.

We wonder where Delilah was as the Philistines came forth and seized Samson, gouging out his eyes and binding him with bronze fetters. Did she know that the eyes which had gazed on her in delighted love had now been cruelly mutilated? Had she gone to collect and to spend those 1,100 pieces of silver from each of the lords of the Philistines?

And where was Delilah when the lords of the Philistines and throngs of other Philistines gathered at a great festival and public sacrifice to their god Dagon? Was Delilah again with them? Did she see Samson stand between the pillars in the great assembly hall and pull them down? If so, she probably perished along with hundreds of others upon whom the building fell.

Milton, in his dramatic poem *Samson Agonistes* (1671), represents Delilah as coming to the prison while Samson was there and offering to atone for her faithlessness. But there is no Biblical authority for this. The three-act grand opera *Samson et Dalila*, by Saint-Satins, first performed at Weimar December 2, 1877, also follows the Bible theme. So does Handel's oratorio *Samson*, first performed at Covent Garden, London, during the Lenten season in 1742.

Could it be that Delilah also was the woman who prompted the words in Proverbs: "For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil" (Prov. 5:3)?

RUTH

Leaves her own land of Moab and goes with her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. Supports both of them with her gleanings from barley in field of Boaz, whom she later marries. Their son Obed is grandfather of King David.

RUTH 1:4, 14, 16), 22; 2:2, 8, 21, 22; 3:9; 4:5, 10, 13

MATT. 1:5

THE FAITHFUL DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

RUTH, the central figure in the Book of Ruth, is one of the most lovable women in the Bible. And her abiding love embraces the person you would least expect it to, her mother-in-law, Naomi. The latter was a Hebrew from Bethlehem-Judah, while Ruth was a foreigner from Moab, a lofty tableland to the east of the Dead Sea. Ruth's alien background is repeatedly stressed. In the short book, five times she is "Ruth the Moabitess," also "the woman of Moab," the "Moabitish damsel," and a "stranger."

Though of a neighboring people, hated by early Israel, Ruth finally won her way into their hearts as the ideal daughter-in-law, wife, and mother. The people of the little town of Bethlehem admired her, not because of her genius or her foresight or her great beauty, but because of her womanly sweetness. Her story, which finally culminates in her marriage to Boaz, a man of influence, is one of the most beautiful romances in the Bible.

Modest, meek, courteous, loyal, responsible, gentle yet decisive, Ruth always seems to do the right thing at the right time. Though the Bible gives no clear-cut description of her appearance, literature and art have depicted her as extremely lovely. In his book on *Ruth* Irving Fineman describes her as a woman "whose radiant beauty of face and form neither the shadows nor the sad state of her raiment could obscure." He further depicts her as having gleaming golden hair and dark eyes. Frank Slaughter's *Song of Ruth* pictures her as "startlingly beautiful, with dark red hair, high cheekbones, and warm eyes" and as a woman who dressed in the "clinging robe of a temple priestess."

At the opening of the story Ruth as the young widow of Mahlon faces an uncertain future, along with her mother-in-law Naomi and her sister-in-law Orpah, widow of Chilion. From this point on Ruth herself becomes the embodiment of all that is fine in a young widow. We do not hear her crying out at the loss of her husband, but expressing her affection for him in her loyalty to his mother, his people, his country, and his God. Nor do we find her pitying herself, though she and her mother-in-law are destitute. Instead she chooses to follow her mother-in-law wherever she leads, and she does so in a spirit of love.

Ruth's husband and his father Elimelech and mother Naomi and brother Chilion had left Bethlehem ten years before because of famine. Recent explorations of the land of Moab have given confirmation of the fertility of the plains of ancient Moab, a fact which is implied in the statement that Naomi's family went there to escape the famine of Judah. Dr. William L. Reed, professor of Old Testament at Texas Christian University and a well-known archaeologist of the Holy Land, reports that explorations and excavations point toward a close association among Hebrews and Moabites, as is implied in the story of Ruth.

Naomi and her family had gone into the fertile, well-watered highlands of Moab east of the Dead Sea, but there her husband and her two sons had died.

Old and weary, Naomi longed to return to the land of her birth. All three women wept as they stood to say good-by. Naomi pleaded with her two daughters-in-law to turn back to their mother's house. Orpah did turn back, but Ruth clung lovingly to her mother-in-law, and as she did she made this most wonderful confession of love ever spoken by a daughter-in-law, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried" (Ruth 1:16).

Like so many young widows, she might have said, "Somebody else must take care of this forlorn old woman. I'm still young. I want to marry again. The mother of my first husband is in my way." But Ruth made this other choice, and she made it gracefully.

She never swerved from her unselfish purpose during the many trials that followed. Nor did she ever complain because she had given up everything, her country, her relationships with young friends, or her chance to marry a man of her own country. She had given them all up with a resolution fierce in its quietness.

The young and beautiful daughter-in-law and the old and wise mother-in-law now turned their faces resolutely toward Palestine.

The journey was less than 120 miles, but this distance represented a long, fatiguing, and dangerous trek in this period thirteen centuries before Christ, especially for two lone women who had neither money beyond their barest needs nor protector. They crossed the Arnon and the Jordan, ascending mountains and descending into deep valleys, partly on foot, let us suppose, and partly on donkeys. This journey through desolate places caused them to cling more closely together.

When they reached Bethlehem, in order to support herself and her mother-in-law Ruth performed the lowliest of tasks, that of following the reapers and gathering up the fragments of grain which fell and were left behind for the poor. Without the least feeling of self-pity or dread of a difficult task, Ruth gleaned all day in the hot sun, returning to Naomi joyfully at the end of the day with her small harvest.

One day, as Ruth gleaned, she came into a field belonging to Boaz, a large landowner, who was a distant kinsman of Naomi's husband. For a time Ruth worked with the other poor gleaners and was unknown to Boaz. She performed her work well, from the hour that the sun first rose over the fields of swaying barley until it dipped gently behind the low-lying hills of Judah.

Humble woman that Ruth was, she did not rush to Boaz, her husband's rich kinsman, and introduce herself, but worked quietly at her task. Her good work was rewarded. When Boaz came into his fields and saw this pretty young woman, he inquired of his servants who she was, and they told him she was the Moabitess who had come back with Naomi from the country of Moab. Immediately offering her his protection, he asked her not to glean in any field except his own, ordered his young men not to touch her, and invited her to drink of the water which they had drawn.

Later he returned his admiration for her in little kindnesses, for he knew not only that she had to support her mother-in-law but that she was a woman with a gentle disposition. "The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (Ruth 2:12).

Boaz, who was a man of God, also a man of intelligence and with a high code of morals, could appreciate Ruth's quiet loveliness, her inborn purity and generosity of soul. And he began to shower small favors upon her. He asked her to come and eat bread and to dip her morsel in wine. As she sat among the reapers, he passed parched grain to her and instructed his helpers to pull out some stalks from their bundles and leave them for her so as to make her gleanings easier and more productive.

When Ruth returned to Naomi at the end of each day with about an ephah (or a bushel) of barley, Naomi would always question her about the day's happenings. Once when Ruth told her she had gleaned in the field of Boaz that day, Naomi said, "Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." And Naomi added, "The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen" (Ruth 2:20).

The entire scene was now set for the culmination of a beautiful romance. We know why Goethe has called the Book of Ruth "the loveliest little idyll that tradition has transmitted to us."

Naomi, an honored matron of Judah, made the next step on behalf of a brighter future for her beloved daughter-in-law. With bold tenderness she directed Ruth to the threshing floor at night, where Boaz would be winnowing his grain. She instructed her to wash, anoint herself, and put on her best raiment, and to go where Boaz was after he had finished eating and drinking. This wise mother-in-law advised Ruth one step further.

"And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do" (Ruth 3:4). Ruth, knowing that her mother-in-law would command her to do nothing that was not considered proper, replied, "All that thou sayest unto me I will do" (Ruth 3:5).

The bold yet humble advance of Ruth was accepted by Boaz with a tender dignity and a chivalrous delicacy. He treated this act by which she threw herself upon his protection as an honor due him, for which he was bound to be grateful. And he hastened to assure her that he was her debtor for the preference she had shown for him. He became as careful for her reputation and chastity as if she had been his daughter.

The measure recommended by Naomi and adopted by Ruth was equivalent to a legal call on Boaz, as the supposed nearest kinsman of the family, to fulfill the duty of that relationship. An archaic custom this was, and one which subjected Ruth to a severe moral test, but she had confidence in her mother-in-law's judgment and she also knew that Boaz had proved himself to be meticulously upright.

This part of the story is handled in the Bible with great delicacy and restraint. First Boaz told his servant not to let it be known that Ruth had come to the threshing floor. There might be idle gossip. He also knew there was a nearer kinsman than himself, one who would have a prior claim to Ruth.

He immediately sent word to Naomi that he gladly accepted the legal protection of her daughter-in-law. Now he summoned the next of kin. This man waived his right to the young widow, admitting that he did not care to redeem Elimelech's portion of the land, a necessary part of a levirate matrimonial transaction, which assured the continuation of family life, the preservation of property, and the welfare of widows.

Boaz had shown his honorable and businesslike traits of character in going to the gates of the city before the elders. Then he went forth publicly to tell that he had brought Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be his wife. And the lovely stranger in Judah became the wife of the rich land proprietor Boaz. By her perseverance and faithfulness, she had achieved the seemingly impossible. She had been lifted out of obscurity and poverty to influence and plenty.

From this marriage of Ruth and Boaz sprang an auspicious lineage, the House of David (Matt. 1:5). Before the birth of her son Obed, Ruth was assured that her child's name would be "famous in Israel"

(Ruth 4:14). And Naomi was told that the child would be a nourisher of her old age. Her neighbors, rejoicing with her, said, "Thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him" (Ruth 4:15). And Naomi joyfully took over the duties of nurse to her grandchild.

Love had worked the miracle in Ruth's life. She was beloved by all because she was so lovable. She had proved that love can lift one out of poverty and obscurity, love can bring forth a wonderful child, love can shed its rays, like sunlight, on all whom it touches, even a forlorn and weary mother-in-law. Ruth's love had even penetrated the barriers of race.

HANNAH

Consecrated mother prays for a son. Samuel is born. She lovingly tends him in his formative years as she prepares him for temple service. Utters famous prayer of dedication in temple. Makes a coat for Samuel each year when she goes to visit him.

I SAM. 1:2, 5, 8, 9, 13, 15) 19, 20, 22

I SAM. 2:1, 21

THE PRAYERFUL MOTHER

THE woman who personifies the ideal in motherhood in the Old Testament is Hannah, mother of Samuel, the earliest of the great Hebrew prophets after Moses and the last of the "Judges." Hannah's story, told in the first two chapters of the first Bible book bearing her son's name, breathes of her love and care of her firstborn, the worthy son of a worthy mother.

In her consecration as a mother Hannah probably inspired Mary, Mother of Jesus, who lived almost twelve centuries later. One wonders if Hannah's Song of Triumph (I Sam. 2:2-10) was not known by Mary. It could have inspired her Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55), because there is certainly a similarity between these two songs of exaltation.

Hannah's environment was not conducive to prayer, for the people of Israel had lapsed from the high standards of morality and spirituality set up by Moses. She had to break away from old traditions and find a new path. Her home environment was not conducive to great dreams either. Her husband Elkanah was a good but easygoing, undistinguished priest; and in these polygamous times he and his other wife, Peninnah, had children, while Hannah had none.

But she believed with all her heart that God was the creator of children and that only God could convert a woman into a mother. Every year she went from her home at Ramah to the temple at Shiloh, and her most ardent prayer was for a child.

It is easy to imagine that Hannah was a young woman whose face bore the radiance of her own spirituality, and that she dressed in a brightly colored, loosely flowing dress of muslin. We can be quite sure that she had stitched it herself and embroidered it with bright colors, for Hannah was gifted with the needle. Later these same gifted hands would lovingly stitch garments for her little son to wear as he served in the temple at Shiloh.

A much anticipated occasion this was when Hannah, Elkanah, and other members of the family saddled their asses and climbed the autumn-tinted hills to Shiloh. Though she was her husband's favorite wife, these journeys to Shiloh, at the vintage season when fall was folding in over the Palestine hills, were trying ones for Hannah. As she saw parents and children coming together, probably she grieved all the more because she had no part in the coming generation. As her husband made his sacrifices in the tabernacle, he would give portions to his other wife Peninnah and to her sons and daughters. Though he gave Hannah a "worthy portion," it was much smaller because she had no children.

Peninnah, jealous because Hannah was the favorite wife, made light of Hannah because "the Lord had shut up her womb" (I Sam. 1:6). But it is greatly to Hannah's credit that this bad treatment caused no outward conflict on her part. Though grieved in spirit, we hear no railing or furious revenge on her part.

Each year, though, it became a hard experience emotionally for Hannah to make the journey to Shiloh. Finally on one trip she wept and would not eat. Her husband, a sensitive man, asked, "Why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (I Sam. 1:8).

We have no answer from Hannah, but we do know she arose and went into the tabernacle to pour out her anguish of soul. And the prayer that she prayed has become one of the great petitions of a mother. "O Lord of hosts," she prayed fervently, "if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head" (I Sam. 1:11). In that last phrase she vowed that she would consecrate her child to God, just as Samson's mother had consecrated him and John the Baptist's mother later would consecrate him. The uncut hair of Hannah's child would be a sign that he was consecrated to God.

Hannah was the fourth great woman in sacred history who grieved because she had not conceived, and among the four she was the most prayerful. Sarah had laughed when she learned a child would be born to her in old age. Rebekah bore her trial with listlessness and indifference. Rachel, irritated at her long wait for a child, exclaimed, "Give me children, or else I die." Hannah sought her call as a mother in the power of God, for she desired a son as a poet desires a song.

Her repetition of the word "handmaid" three times expressed her humility, submission, and sense of dependence on God. From such humility Hannah received new strength.

Eli, the priest, seeing her lips move, but not understanding her silence, asked if she were drunk. But Hannah asserted, "No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord" (I Sam. 1:15).

This defense of Hannah is almost as wonderful as her prayer. It argues her conscious integrity, innocence, and serenity of spirit, even in an hour of great trial and unjustified criticism. When Eli saw how eager she was for a child, he joined her in prayer, asking that the God of Israel grant her petition. And Hannah went her way firm in her conviction that God would answer her prayer for a son. She worshiped with her husband again the next morning.

This continued reverence was significant. It showed she was not one to pray once and be satisfied, but was willing to pray again and again. When her prayer was answered and there was born to her a son, she named him Samuel, meaning "asked Of the Lord" (I Sam. 1:20). In her loving care of Samuel, Hannah becomes the prototype of the good mother everywhere, setting a stirring example of high morality and spirituality, which could bring a new order into the world.

Let us picture this early mother of Israel, if we may, as she nursed and tended the little Samuel, bestowing upon him all the love that a devoted mother would have for her first-born. When he was little, she never left him with others, but gently tended him herself. She even declined a trip with her husband to the tabernacle at Shiloh because her baby had not yet been weaned. In that decision alone she placed upon motherhood a high obligation and responsibility.

Finally, when the child was weaned, Hannah dressed him for his first trip to the tabernacle, where she was to leave him. The atmosphere around this place of worship sometimes became polluted. Eli, the priest, though a good man himself, had sons who "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (I Sam. 2:22). But Hannah had no fears for her son. She had placed him in the hands of God, and she believed strongly in her heart that God would answer the petition she had made before his birth.

Loving him as she did, it was a sacrifice for her to return to Ramah without him. But Hannah was a wise and prudent mother as well as a devoted one, a mother who possessed fortitude as well as vision. Practical, too, she did not discommode the whole family, sacrifice the good of her husband, and move to Shiloh simply because she desired in her heart to be near Samuel day and night. While he was a little fellow, for his own good she weaned him in spirit just as she had weaned him from her breast.

Before she left Samuel in the tabernacle with Eli, however, she prayed to God a triumphant prayer that has been called the forerunner of Mary's Magnificat. In it Hannah exhibited the fervency, depth, and fire of a woman who was happy and who sang her happiness and belief in God. She loved her God, not mainly because He had delivered to her a son, but for what He was to all, a God of knowledge and of power.

She prayed for those who stumbled, but were girded with strength, those who had been hungry, but were fed, those also who were barren, as she had been barren. She sang also to the Lord who bringeth low and lifteth up, who raiseth up the poor out of the dust and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes.

Hannah affirmed also that God would keep the feet of his saints on the right road and the wicked should be cut off in darkness. She spoke with positive devotion, saying, "For by strength shall no man prevail" (I Sam. 2:9). She was certain that the Lord would judge the ends of the earth and exalt His anointed.

One of the remarkable things about Hannah's prayer was that she prayed it after she had become the mother of a wonderful son, making us know she was a woman who prayed in good times and bad, in joy and affliction. She was grateful that her son, young though he was, could learn to perform many little duties in the tabernacle: light a candle or hold a dish or run an errand or shut a door. And because he would learn to do these menial tasks joyfully, he would rise in a greater ministry to the Lord.

After a while the boy Samuel did his work so well in the temple that Eli appointed him to wear the simple linen vest worn by the priests and called an ephod. Hannah made him a coat or robe of blue fabric to wear under the ephod. We can be sure Hannah put love into every stitch of the coat, which reached to the boy's feet. As Samuel outgrew one coat each year, she would make him another and take it with her when the family went to Shiloh for the yearly sacrifices.

The priest, Eli, witnessing the unselfishness of Hannah, asked that God visit her, and she conceived and bore three sons and two daughters. The last of Hannah's biography confirms that the child Samuel grew before the Lord (I Sam. 2:21). This links the boyhood of Samuel with that of Jesus. It is recorded that when Jesus was twelve He went to the temple at Jerusalem and tarried there. He, too, "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

Hannah, like Mary, gave her child to God, and after she did, slipped into the background and became immortal through her son.

ICHABOD'S MOTHER

Husband killed in battle. She gives birth to son after husband's death and other family tragedies, then dies.

I SAM. 4:19-22

A MOTHER WITHOUT HOPE

IN that gallery of Bible women where we find mirrored every type of woman living today stands Ichabod's mother, symbolizing the woman who gives birth to a child after she has received word of her husband's death in battle. Then she dies herself. More particularly she symbolizes the mother who succumbs to dark, despairing hopelessness.

Her husband, Phinehas, was immoral and greedy. Since she made no record of any kind herself, it is easy to imagine her as a careworn, sorrowful woman. Her first name is not recorded, and the only words from her lips are "The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken" (I Sam. 4:21).

This leads one to believe that she was a sincerely devout woman but one who believed more in the ark, a symbol of God, than in God himself. She probably held to the superstitious belief that the ark of the Covenant, and not God, had helped her people in the crossing of the Jordan by causing the waters to part, and had delivered Jericho to them on the solemn march around the city by causing the walls to fall.

Her religion probably represented an emotionalism and not a true devotion to God. And it could not sustain her in her many family tragedies, beginning with the death of her husband and his brother in battle. She probably realized, too, that her husband did not hand down a good heritage to her son, for he and his brother, it is recorded, "lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (I Sam. 2:22). And he and his brother, it was later learned, had been guardians of the ark when it fell into the hands of the enemy.

She faced another tragedy, too, just before the birth of her son. Her aged father-in-law, Eli, priest at the temple at Shiloh, had fallen and broken his neck when he received the shocking news that his two sons had been killed in battle and that the ark of the Covenant, so long in his temple at Shiloh, had been taken by the Philistines.

The loss of the ark seemed to bring almost as great a shock to Ichabod's mother as it did to Eli. And when this was added to other family tragedies, her child was born prematurely, and she died soon afterward. She became the second mother in the Bible to die in childbirth. Unlike Rachel, no loving husband was at her side as she died, and unlike Rachel also, no tomb marks the spot where she was buried.

There is this parallel, however, in her story and Rachel's. A Rachel's side was a midwife, who comforted her with these words, "Fear not; thou shalt have this son also" (Gen. 35:17). Those who attended Ichabod's mother said, "Fear not; for thou hast born a son" (I Sam. 4:20).

But Ichabod's mother held out no hope for her son, who had been born into a land from which the symbol of God had departed. She knew all too well that the child's degenerate and greedy father had died in battle, but not as a hero of the godly people of Israel. She probably remembered, too, that this child's grandfather Eli, though a good priest, was a weak and indulgent father. And she did not have the faith or the stamina to rise above such overwhelming disappointments and shocking tragedies, or the courage to live and nurture her son Ichabod.

Had she possessed the faith of Sarah, or the consecration of Hannah, her son Ichabod might have been illustrious and not inglorious. And he might have retrieved for the Israelites the ark of the Covenant which his father had lost to the Philistines.

Women in the Days of the Kings

MICHAL

Estranged from her husband David because of her father's jealousy of his valor. She is next married to Phalti. When David becomes king, he demands his wife back; she mocks him when he dances before the ark. She cares for sister's five children in her last years.

1 SAM. 24:49; 18:20, 27, 28 19:11,12,13,17 25:44

2 SAM. 3:13, 14; 6:16, 20, 21, 23 21:8

1 CHRON. 15:29

KING SAUL'S DAUGHTER-DAVID'S FIRST WIFE

THOUGH a woman of exceptional fortitude in time of trouble, Michal, King Saul's daughter and David's first wife, lacked a genuine appreciation of her husband's religious zeal. It is to her credit, however, that she aided David in his early struggles long before he became king of Israel.

Her older sister Merab had first been promised by her father to David after he returned victorious over Goliath, the giant champion of their enemies the Philistines. She was to be his reward for the victory. But King Saul failed to fulfill his promise. He gave his daughter Merab to Adriel, the Meholathite.

Next, we learn from the Scripture, "Michal Saul's daughter loved David" (I Sam. 18:20). She was the younger daughter. It is easy to suppose that she and David had often met when her brother Jonathan, a great admirer of David, had brought him home. And to a king's young daughter the brave and strong David became a great hero.

Michal must have had a gentle mother. Her name was Ahinoam. But her father Saul was an obstinate, jealous, and murderous man. He disliked David and began to plan how Michal might be the stumbling block to David's promising career.

As he began a plot against David, Saul sent the flattering word by servants to David that he wanted him for his son-in-law. Humble as he was at this time, young David sent word back to King Saul that it was no light thing to be a king's son-in-law.

Then it was that Saul said David could have Michal if he would go out and kill one hundred Philistines and bring back the foreskins to him. Saul was sure David would be killed himself, but David surprised him. He brought back the foreskins of two hundred Philistines. And Michal became his wife.

Saul, however, did not cease plotting against David. One day, as his unsuspecting son-in-law sat entertaining him with music, a tall spear sped like lightning from Saul's hand toward David. But it missed its aim and went harmlessly over his head. David fled and escaped.

Michal, probably distraught at her father's continued attempts to take her husband's life because she was still in love with him, began to plan how she could save him. Messengers had already come to her house telling her that they would slay David in the morning. Warning David of his approaching danger, Michal let him down through a window, and he escaped. When her father commanded David to come to him, she sent back word that David was sick, but her father, still persistent, asked his messengers to deliver the sick David on his bed.

David was already well on his way to safety when Michal, to appease her father's wrath, took a large image resembling a recumbent figure, put it in David's bed, and then made a pillow of red goat's hair. The bed with what appeared to be a sleeping figure was taken before her father, and when he discovered the trick his daughter had played on him he asked why she had deceived him.

Clever woman that Michal was, she evaded her father's question, telling him that David had said to her, "Let me go; why should I kill thee?" (I Sam. 19:17). When Michal dared to defy a madman king like her father in order to save her husband, she must have possessed real courage.

We have no record that Michal had David's faith in God's protecting power. She no doubt believed in idols. When she placed the image in David's bed, to resemble his recumbent figure, it appears that she had other idols near at hand. Commentators, however, question the size of Michal's idol that she placed in the bed. It had to be large, in order that it might resemble a reclining figure. And teraphim, like the one Rachel had carried away from her father's house, were small enough to put in a saddlebag. There is some discrepancy in this passage of Michal's idol but enough evidence to lead us to think she was not a believer in David's God of strength and mercy.

For a long time after this David remained an outlaw in exile from his wife's father. It would be almost impossible for a marriage to survive under such conditions. After some time had passed, King Saul arranged for Michal to marry Phalti, also called Phaltiel. Michal probably went with him to live in his town of Gallim.

Evidently some years passed before David and Michal ever met again. These were polygamous times, and David married Abigail, the woman of good understanding and a staunch believer in God. He also took another wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel.

When David became Saul's successor as king, he demanded that his wife Michal be returned to him. This was done. As he marched up to Jerusalem with the ark of the Covenant accompanied by 30,000 chosen men of Israel, Michal looked from a window and saw David, girded in a linen ephod, leaping and dancing before the newly restored ark. Not understanding David's religious zeal, Michal thought her husband was acting in an undignified manner.

When David saw that the ark was set in the tabernacle prepared for it, he returned to bless his own household. Then Michal came out to meet him and mocked him scornfully, saying, "How glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovered himself!" (II Sam. 6:20).

Because David obviously wore nothing but the ephod, a custom not uncommon in these times, Michal "despised him in her heart" (II Sam. 6:16). We might also infer that David's acts had reflected on his wife's queenly dignity because he had mingled so freely with the common people.

There must have been other reasons, too, for Michal's resentment of David. When he demanded her back after he became king, she did not forget that he was taking her away from a husband with whom she must have spent several years. This husband, Phalti, we learn, wept as he followed Michal to Bahurim, where she was taken from him (II Sam. 3:16). But as king, David could demand whomever he chose, even a former wife who had married again.

The final record of the Michal-David love affair comes when David curtly tells Michal that he does not care for her opinion about the ephod and that he trusts the common sense of the maids and their loyalty to understand his motive. There then follows the phrase, "Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death" (II Sam. 6:23).

A rather conflicting passage appears later, in II Samuel 21:8, when the five sons of Michal are mentioned. Scholars seem to be convinced that this is a scribal error, that these were not Michal's sons but the sons of her sister Merab, and that she had reared them as her own after her sister's death.

Summing up the Bible portrait of Michal, first we see a young, beautiful, loving, courageous girl. But at the end we see a disillusioned, bickering woman with an inner poverty of spirit, one oppressed with many tragedies.

Not only had she been torn from two husbands, but if she lived long enough she had seen the five sons or nephews she had reared hanged in revenge for her father's wickedness. Also she had seen her father rejected by God, troubled by an evil spirit, and then killed by falling on his own sword. And his head was sent among many villages of the Philistines.

How could there be any happiness for his daughter Michal, who, like her father, had rejected God in her life?

ABIGAIL

First married to Nabal, drunkard, who is owner of large herds and lands. He angers David. She acts as mediator to appease him. Takes gifts of cooked foods to David and his 600 men. After Nabal's death she becomes one of David's wives. Bears him a son Chileab.

I SAM. 25:3, 14, 18, 21 32, 36, 39, 40, 42; 27:3 30:5

II SAM. 2:2 3:3

I CHRON. 3:1

A WOMAN OF GOOD UNDERSTANDING

BECAUSE of her good understanding, Abigail might be called the earliest woman pacifist on record. Certainly of all the famous women in the Old Testament she was the wisest.

Though she was to become David's wife after the death of her husband, Nabal, a drunkard, it is as the wife of the latter that her fine character comes into the sharpest focus. In this first picture of Abigail we come to know why David later was to have such faith in her wise counsel. From his first meeting with her David's life seems to have taken on a higher meaning and a stronger purpose. He is no longer a fugitive and outlaw but destined to become the great king of Judah and of all Israel.

Abigail was one of David's eight wives. The others were Michal (I Sam. 18:27), Bath-sheba (II Sam. 12:24), Ahinoam, Maacah, Haggith, Abital, and Eglah (II Sam. 3:2, 3, 4, 5), but Abigail was the greatest influence for good and helped David to remember that he was God's anointed into whose keeping the kingdom of Israel had been entrusted.

When David and Abigail chanced to meet, he was a shepherd hiding from Saul in the wilderness of Paran, an extended tract along the southern border of Canaan adjoining the Sinaitic desert. He had gathered around him about six hundred followers, who constituted a bodyguard and voluntarily protected the flocks of many a herdsman from prowling thieves.

In the sheep and goat country west of the Dead Sea, and not far from where David was, lay the town of Maon. Near by was the larger town of Carmel standing in mountainous country. One of the richest men in this area was Abigail's husband, Nabal, who had some three thousand sheep and one thousand goats. Their home probably was a pretentious place on a plateau that one came upon suddenly after leaving desolate brown limestone hills, bare valleys, and dry watercourses.

It was sheep-shearing season at the home of Abigail and Nabal. Many guests had gathered, and there was much feasting. Abigail had provided abundantly for her guests, for she was a woman who had a reputation for gracious hospitality. We can imagine that her hospitable house, run efficiently and well, was a place where the stranger liked to tarry.

On such feasting occasions let us picture Abigail in a dress of fine linen, probably a vivid blue, with a softly draped headdress of shell pink forming a flattering outline for her brown hair and her delicate features. The headdress probably fell into a sash around her slender waist.

We have the Biblical record that Abigail was of a beautiful countenance as well as a woman of good understanding (I Sam. 25:3). But in the next phrase her husband, Nabal, is described as "churlish and evil in his doings" (I Sam. 25:3). His most niggardly act was directed at David, who had sent ten of his men up to the hills to ask for a little food during feasting time. David's own provisions were running low. His request was polite and just, for ten men could not carry away much food.

David and his men had helped Nabal's shepherds to protect their master's large herds of sheep and goats. It was quite natural that David's shepherds, who had befriended Nabal's man, would be welcome at feasting time. But Nabal, drinking too heavily, cried out contemptuously when he heard of David's request, "Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master" (I Sam. 25:10).

When word reached Abigail, through one of the workers on the place, that her husband had railed at David's messengers, she listened attentively. This worker, who evidently had confidence in his mistress' sagacity, reminded her that David and his herdsmen had been like a wall of protection to Nabal's herdsmen. And he added that they had come to the house in peace, asking for that to which they were justly entitled. We can be assured that Abigail possessed an innate dignity and had won the respect and faithfulness of the workers in her household.

Wise woman, too, that she was, she lost no time, for she knew what happened when strong-minded men like David were angered. He was not one to let such an affront go unpunished. She also knew how rashly her husband acted when he was drunk. She wasted no time in lamenting the threatened danger or in making aspersions on her husband's character. Certainly she did not pause to discuss David's anger with her drunken husband.

Instead she hastily made ready to prepare special foods for David's six hundred men. She asked no advice of anyone but went to work as judiciously and quietly as if she had had months to think over her actions and make preparations for the food. She supervised the baking and packing of two hundred loaves of bread. Also, she had five sheep dressed and five measures of grain parched, and she packed two skins of wine, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs (I Sam. 25:18). Then she had everything loaded on asses and mounted an ass herself. Let us imagine it was a white one, and as she mounted it, she beckoned to her helpers to ride before her with the food.

Only a capable and affluent woman could have made ready so much food in such haste. Only a woman of good understanding could have left so quietly, without informing her husband of her actions. If she had, she knew he would demand that she not give away his food to strangers. She knew, too, that the safety of their entire household was at stake.

As Abigail came down under the cover of the mountain, David and his men rode toward her, and she heard David telling them of her husband's ingratitude and of how he had returned to him evil for good. She overheard David say that by morning all that Nabal possessed and all in his household would be destroyed.

Abigail, unafraid, hastened toward David and alighted from her ass. In all humility she began to intercede for her husband and apologize for his bad actions. She admitted to David that Nabal was a base fellow and a fool. She then begged David to receive the food she had brought and to forgive her trespasses. She praised David, telling him that evil would not be found in him so long as he lived.

She also predicted that he would be prince over Israel and that his soul would be "bound in the bundle of life with the Lord thy God." She confirmed that God's word was sure and that God would exalt him. Abigail's supplication to David runs through I Samuel 25:24-31. In not one word do we find her forgetting her own dignity. All of the greatness which she predicted would come to David she attributed to the only source of good, God Himself. And she helped David to know he was the object of God's love and care.

What but the unquestioning faith in God could have dictated such a humble petition? In it Abigail typifies woman in her noblest, purest character. Her actions reveal that she was a diplomat of the highest order and that she understood men and had tolerance for their bad behavior.

When she had finished her mission, she did not loiter. She quickly mounted her ass and wended her way back over the hills. We can imagine that David watched her until she was lost in the distance. He probably had been impressed with her good countenance, and he was not to forget this woman who had brought all of this excellent food to his hungry men. His admiration for her one day would take on a deeper, richer meaning.

When Abigail arrived home, she found her husband still feasting and drinking. But, wisely, she did not tell him of her journey until morning. When the sober Nabal learned from Abigail how near he had come to being slain by David and his men and what she had done to avoid such an attack, he became violently ill. Ten days later he died. He probably died of apoplexy when he realized the perilous situation in which he had placed himself.

David, later to learn of Nabal's death, would affectionately remember the woman of good understanding who had come over the mountain on the ass, bringing food to appease his hunger. He was now free to wed Abigail, and so he sent his servants, telling her that he wanted her to be his wife.

She was now the petitioned and not the petitioner. She accepted David's invitation for marriage, but it was in humility and selfabasement. To his messengers she said, "Behold, let thine handmaid be a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord" (I Sam. 25:41). Though Abigail brought to David a rich estate and a new social position, she felt unworthy to become the wife of one whom God had singled out for His work.

Abigail was just the wife that David needed, for he was willful and tempestuous, while she was humble and gentle. Probably she helped him to learn patience and forbearance and to put aside temptation. She also helped to inspire confidence in him.

She dwelt with David at Gath and also went with him to Hebron, and there she gave birth to their son, Chileab, also called Daniel. Though little is recorded about Abigail after her marriage to David, we can be sure she was continually exposed to danger from the enmity of Saul and his followers and to captivity from neighboring

nations. When the Amalekites captured Ziklag, she was taken captive but was rescued by David after he had defeated the enemy.

In their years together, David probably said to Abigail many times, as he had said to her when she first rode up to him on the ass, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice" (I Sam. 25: 32'33).

WOMAN OF ENDOR

A woman with a "familiar spirit," she lives at town of Endor. King Saul goes to her in desperation. She foretells his death. Terrified, he becomes ill, and she prepares food to try to restore him as he rests on her bed.

I SAM. 28:7-25

A CAVE WOMAN WHO TOLD FORTUNES

THE King James Version calls her "a woman that hath a familiar spirit" (I Sam. 28:7). The Revised Standard Version calls her "the woman who is a medium." Modern writers have dubbed her the "Witch of Endor." Lord Byron has called her the "Phantom Seer." Kipling gives one of the most vivid portrayals of all in these lines:

Oh, the road to Endor is the oldest road
And the craziest road of all.
Straight it runs to the witch's abode
As it did in the day of Saul
And nothing has changed of the sorrow in store
For such as go down the road to En-dor.

Let us picture the woman at Endor as a wise old person with gnarled hands, deep, penetrating eyes, coarse, leathery skin, and dark hair falling over her stooped shoulders. Probably she had resorted to fortunetelling because it was her only means of livelihood. Maybe she had made some startling true predictions. Because she had, many had gone to her cave home, seeking counsel.

However, in her magic, she broke laws that had been set down for the people of Israel. In Leviticus 19:31 is this strong admonition: "Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God." Other passages just as firmly denouncing sorcerers and stargazers appear in Deuteronomy, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. And in an earlier part of his reign Saul himself had "put away those that had familiar spirits" (I Sam. 28:3).

But now he was a terrified old king, jealous of David, not respected by his own son Jonathan, and ridiculed by the people of his kingdom. In a desperate state of mind, he planned to go down the road to Endor, along with other material-minded people who had forgotten God. The road he traveled led six miles southeast of Nazareth. On the outskirts of Endor were many ancient caves. And let us suppose this woman with the familiar spirit lived in one of them. Probably her cave was hung with skins of wild animals to keep out winds from the northern slope in the winter; in the summer its portal was dark and terrifying, the last place you would expect the king of Israel to enter.

Earlier in his career, as he valiantly fought down all his enemies; including the Philistines, Ammonites, Moabites, and Amalekites Saul would have scoffed at magic. Then he was afraid of no man, but now he was a fear-ridden, weary old man, who longed to bring back the dead Samuel, upon whom he had once leaned so heavily in, moments of depression. It was in one of these moments that Saul told his servants to seek out and find a woman that had a familiar spirit.

Ashamed to let it be known publicly that he was seeking aid from such a woman, King Saul disguised himself in other garments.

"faking two men with him, he made his way to her gloomy cave under cover of darkness. This woman possessed a certain wise caution, for she said to her visitor, "Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?" (I Sam. 28:9).

But her visitor promised her there would be no punishment. Then the woman asked him, "Whom shall I bring up unto thee?" (I Sam. 28:11). And Saul commanded her to bring up Samuel, but the woman now cried with a loud voice, "Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul?" (I Sam. 28:12).

She no longer doubted that she was being visited by the king of Israel. But when she was assured by Saul that she must not be afraid, she made her predictions, telling him that she saw gods ascending out of the earth. "An old man cometh up," she spoke, "and he is covered with a mantle" (I Sam. 28:14).

Convinced that the old man might be Samuel, whom he had relied upon so firmly for faith and inspiration, Saul was temporarily comforted. And the woman, by some kind of magic, brought forth the voice of Samuel, who predicted Saul's downfall and death.

The very fear that Saul had had as he made his way to see the woman at Endor was now more real. Unable to fight his battle of depression any longer, he fell from fright and fatigue on the cold, damp earth of the woman's cave. At this point she arose to nobler stature. Laying aside her role as fortuneteller, she became a hospitable and kind hostess, eager to minister to a weary old man.

"Let me set a morsel of bread before thee; and eat, that thou mayest have strength, when thou goest on thy way" (I Sam. 28:22), pleaded the woman of Endor. She and his servants compelled him then to lie down on her bed.

While he rested, she killed a fat calf, that she had, took flour, kneaded it, and made unleavened bread. This food prepared by the woman of Endor was probably the last that King Saul ate, for the next day the Philistines cut off his head and fastened his body to the wall.

Maybe this woman had sensed more than she even dared to tell King Saul. She possessed a peculiar power, but suppose she had sought to use that power to lead King Saul and others on to a knowledge of God rather than into the mysteries of wizardry. What great things might this woman have achieved!

RIZPAH

A concubine of Saul. Abner takes her after 21:8, 10, at Saul's death and quarrels with Saes son over her. Her two sons are murdered, also Saul's five grandsons. She watches over their dead bodies from barley harvest until fall rain. Later David learns of her merifice and has her loved ones buried in family grave.

II SAM. 3:7

A MOTHER WHO GUARDS SONS' DEAD BODIES

THE suffered greater tribulation than any woman in the Old Testament. For five months, from the barley harvest until the early rains, Rizpah watched over the dead, unburied bodies of her two sons resting beside the bodies of Saul's five grandsons. Rizpah's name has come to mean intense suffering, such as only a devoted mother can endure.

Others had forsaken her loved ones, who had been hanged and accursed, but Rizpah stood by them in death as she had in life. She could not hinder the seizure and hanging of her sons and relatives, but she could watch so that no further dishonor would be done to their bodies.

Taking sackcloth, she spread it out to shield her by day and to rest on at night. Though stifled by the heat and chilled by the cold night air, Rizpah remained near those sun-scorched, weird, blackened, dishonored bodies, watching closely to save them from further harm. Now standing, now sitting, now half dead with sleepiness, and then quivering with daring effort, she drove away the dogs and vultures that would have devoured her dead.

Alone on a weary rock, week after week, for five months she remained. Probably passersby gazed curiously from the distance at this woman watching alone, either pitying or mocking her. Some, let us suppose, called her mad and others cheered her for her courage.

Today we can gaze with admiring wonder at Rizpah's love and patience. And what faith! She believed that sooner or later God would deliver the land from famine. She also knew in her heart that her dear ones then might at least have an honorable burial. She believed that they hung there, not for their own sins, but for the sins of others, and she would not forsake them.

Rizpah, in her suffering, typifies thousands of wives, daughters, and sisters, either sitting by the bedside of loved ones or mourning at their death. Silently and alone, too, like Rizpah, many of them bear their sorrow.

Her bitter trial came largely through Saul's sins. She had been his concubine. At Saul's death she had been appropriated by Abner, Saul's general and regent for his son Ish-bosheth, who according to the law of that time would have fallen heir to Rizpah. The two men quarreled over Rizpah. Later Abner was slain by Joab with King David's knowledge. All of this came not too long after the beheading of Saul, another tribulation Rizpah had had to endure.

By him she had had two sons, Armoni and Mephibosheth. They were put to death during the famine in David's reign. Three years' famine had made David anxious. In seeking a reason for the calamity, he concluded it was because of Saul's unavenged conduct to the Gibeonites. In order to appease Jehovah, he had the two sons of Saul and Rizpah hanged, as well as Saul's five grandsons, probably the sons of his daughter Merab.

These seven heirs of Saul were hanged at Gibeah, reminding us that the sins of the father had been visited upon the second and third generation. Though Rizpah had nothing to do with Saul's sin against the Gibeonites, she had to bear some of its most fearful consequences.

She who had worn queenly garments while a concubine in the court of King Saul now donned sackcloth for mourning and probably spread sackcloth upon the rock holding the gallows upon which her sons and her husband's grandsons had been hanged. It has been suggested in one old commentary (Cobbins) that she made a tent of sackcloth and placed it over the bodies of her sons. This sounds altogether possible because sackcloth of Old Testament times was a coarse cloth woven on a loom from the hair of goats and camels.

Some commentators interpret the spreading of the sackcloth as a sign that the land had repented because of drought and famine. When Rizpah spread it out to protect the bodies of her sons, she probably made a pledge with God that she would watch over them until He relented and the rains came.

Rizpah's long watch over her sons' dead bodies is one of literature's most tragic examples of a mother's love. We wonder if her story suggested Tennyson's "Rizpah," which transfers a resolute devotion to a different but equally tragic setting.

Celebrated artists have depicted the suffering of Rizpah on canvas. Turner painted one of the most famous of these pictures. The seven bodies are depicted lying on the rock, covered with sackcloth. Rizpah has her face covered with one hand; with the other she waves a lighted torch to frighten off wild animals. A lion crouches near, and a bird of prey circles in the air.

Rizpah's suffering finally reached David's ears. He remembered that the uncared-for bones of Saul and Jonathan still lay at Jabeshgilead. These were recovered and apparently mingled with the bones of Rizpah's sons and Saul's grandsons. Together they were buried in the family grave at Zelah.

Probably Rizpah watched the interment of the bones of Saul and their sons and wondered if any woman had ever known greater tragedy. Certainly no woman had ever shown greater endurance or stoicism amid such tragedy.

BATH-SHEBA

Wife of Uriah, one of David's faithful generals. David, desiring her for his own, orders that she be brought to him. Child is born of this adulterous union; dies after Bath-sheba's husband is ordered into front of battle by David and killed. David then takes Bath-sheba for his wife. Four sons, including Solomon, are born to them. She intercedes for her son's succession to throne.

II SAM. 11:3 12:24 1 KINGS 1:11,15,16,28,31 2:13, 18, 19

I CHRON. 3:5

MOTHER OF SOLOMON

COMMENTATORS differ in their opinions about Bath-sheba. Some, like Frank S. Mead in his *Who's Who in the Bible*, describe her character as a "dirty, apologetic gray." Others, especially the older commentators, depict her as a woman more "sinned against than sinning."

Regardless of these conflicting opinions, several much quoted verses in the Bible center around her life. It was after the death of the child of their adulterous union that David spoke the often quoted funeral text, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (II Sam. 12:23). Nathan, the prophet, immediately denounced David in a parable, pressing home his accusation with the words "Thou art the man" (II Sam. 12:1-7). The historical note introducing the 51st Psalm calls this David's prayer for remission of sins after Nathan had denounced him for his sin with Bath-sheba. Clearly we hear his words ring out: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:2-3).

Jewish tradition has it that Bath-sheba recited the 31st Proverb on chastity, temperance, and the qualities of a good wife, to her son Solomon at his first marriage. Some sources, especially the Jewish again, point out that this might have been written by Solomon in memory of his mother. Other sources take the view that the Book of Proverbs probably comes from the post-Exilic period about five centuries later than the Solomonic era of 960-922 B.C.

With all of this material to assist us in addition to that which presents itself in the opening of her Bible biography (II Sam. 11:2), we can search deeply into the character of Bath-sheba. Her husband Uriah, one of King David's most trusted generals, was fighting the Ammonitish war. It is probable that Bath-sheba was a bride. We know she was "very beautiful to look upon" (II Sam. 11:2). We also know she came from a God-fearing family, for her father's name was Eliam (Ammiel), which in Hebrew means "God is gracious."

The setting of the opening scene of her story, the roof-top of Bath-sheba's home, and the time, eventide, suggest a romantic novel. Bath-sheba was bathing, as was the custom in this era of about ten centuries before Christ, on the roof of her Jerusalem home. David's new palace on the eastern ridge commanded a view of her house. He had gone out on his roof-top for a walk in the cool night air, always more refreshing on a Jerusalem evening than the air inside closed walls.

As King David promenaded on his palace roof, he saw the woman washing herself. Artists have pictured Bath-sheba as having luxuriant golden tresses that fell over shapely shoulders, also as having exquisite features and skin. Probably King David had become accustomed to indulging his fancy freely in the matter of attractive women and he was immediately attracted to Bath-sheba.

Following this opening scene, we have the frank statement of fact, "David sent messengers, and took her; and she came in unto him, and he lay with her; for she was purified from her uncleanness: and she returned unto her house" (II Sam. 11:4). According to the laws, Bath-sheba could not have resisted had she desired, for a woman in these ancient times was completely subject to a king's will. If he desired her, he could have her. Consequently her part in the story is neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. Even Sarah, some centuries before, because of her beauty had been taken into the harems of two kings, Abimelech and Pharaoh.

The Bible narrators give us no indication of Bath-sheba's thoughts or feelings in the matter. "I am with child" (II Sam. 11:5) was the message she sent to David; and she left him to deal with the situation.

In order to avoid a court scandal, he acted quickly and treacherously toward Bath-sheba's husband Uriah, a man valiant and strong. First King David called Uriah to Jerusalem and insisted that he go down to his wife, but Uriah slept in his barracks with his men. Still the conscience-stricken David, eager to throw the burden on Bath-sheba's husband, tried a second time to prevail upon Uriah to go to his wife. But the conscientious, deeply consecrated soldier told David that the ark and Israel and Judah abided in tents and that his commander-in-chief, Joab, and David's servants were encamped in the open field. Probably Bath-sheba's husband had respect for the law which forbade intercourse to warriors who had been consecrated for battle (I Sam. 21:4). Another time David sought a way out of his predicament by making Uriah drunk, but still he would not go down to his wife. Finally, David ordered what practically amounted to Uriah's murder. He treacherously wrote out the order that Bath-sheba's husband be placed in the forefront of the hottest battle. And Uriah, listed as one of the "mighty men," died in battle at David's order.

The crime was David's, but what about the penalty for the crime? Was that not Bath-sheba's? "She mourned for her husband" (II Sam. 11:26), we are told. Her grief may have been routine. Again, her grief may have been more poignant because of her own transgressions, for she was already with child, David's child.

Though we have no other expression of her feelings, we do have a vivid record of how David felt after he had gone in to Bath-sheba. We can almost hear him cry out, as he prays for the remission of his sins, "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me" (Ps. 51:9-10). When their child, born out of wedlock, died, David spoke his famous lament mentioned above: "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."

II Samuel 11:27 tells how, when the mourning was passed, David brought Bath-sheba to his palace and made her his wife. She bore him a son, Solomon, whose name means "the peaceful," an indication that he was probably born after David's wars had ended. In addition to Solomon, Bath-sheba had three other sons by David, Shimea, Shobab, and Nathan, but it is as the mother of Solomon that she takes her honored place among the famous women of the Bible. In the genealogy of Jesus (Matt. 1:6), she is mentioned as the former wife of Uriah and mother of Solomon by David.

Once introduced into the palace, Bath-sheba quickly gained a commanding influence at court. During the years of Solomon's youth there is no record of her. But when King David was old and dying, she carried out the most important mission of her life. She intervened to have her son Solomon succeed his father as king of Israel. The Abingdon Bible Commentary refers to this visit as "guileful intervention" on Bath-sheba's part. On the other hand, the same commentary grants that she must have been a "remarkable" woman. "She was David's favorite wife," continues this account, "who kept her ascendancy over him long after her youthful charms had vanished."

Evidently Bath-sheba became a strong force in the court party that wanted to make her son, Solomon, king at the time when Adonijah, David's son by Haggith, was plotting to become king. Absalom, David's third son by Maacah, had been killed by General Joab who shot three darts at him while his hair entangled him in a tree. The fact that the prophet Nathan, who had once denounced David, now conspired with Bath-sheba to have Solomon made king seems to be evidence enough that she had won great respect.

Bath-sheba's plea before the aged King David for their son Solomon, running through I Kings 1:17-21, shows wisdom, finesse, courtesy, and vision. Touched by Bath-sheba's entreaty for their son, King David said to her, "As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, . . . assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead" (I Kings 1:29, 30). Soon their son was on his way, riding on David's own mule to Gihon Spring in the valley below Jerusalem to be anointed king over Israel by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet.

Only an intelligent, respected woman, in whom the aged king had great confidence, could have won so great a victory. Only a righteous woman, it would seem, could have been sought out by the prophet Nathan. And only a much loved mother could have been so warmly greeted as was Bath-sheba when she went to her son after he became king. When she came before him, he accorded her the place of honor as queen mother on his right side, a place of power and authority.

Because of her influence with her son, Adonijah later appealed to her for Abishag, King David's young concubine. Bath-sheba went to the king with Adonijah's request. Not knowing what his mother's request would be, King Solomon said, "Ask on, my mother: for I will not say thee nay" (I Kings 2:20). He did say nay, however, and even ordered Adonijah's death, for he was wiser than his mother and knew that it was an ancient Semitic custom that the man who inherited the women of the dead king was his successor. Though Bath-sheba failed in her petition, she demonstrated that she was a kind woman, one to whom her son, now holding the scepter, turned with pleasure and with honor.

We know that the stormy scenes of her young womanhood had all passed. Though she had lost the child born of adultery, it had been her pleasure to educate for the kingdom another son, to see him anointed king, and then to sit by him when he began to rule.

Not only is Bath-sheba mentioned in I Chronicles 3:5 under the name of Bath-shua, the mother of four of David's sons, but she is accorded in Matthew 1:6 a special place in the genealogy of Jesus. Though there is a question about whether the Book of Proverbs was written by her son, it bears a striking relationship to her life, opening as it does with many dark pictures of a woman as man's seductress, but closing happily with the picture of the ideal woman who is a trusted companion and devoted mother.

Bath-sheba lives on, even today some twenty-nine centuries later, as the honored and serene mother of Israel's wisest king, as a wife possessing a noble calmness and gentle dignity, and as a woman of queenly carriage as well as one who was "very beautiful to look upon."

TWO MOTHERS of SOLOMON'S TIME

A child is born to each of two harlots dwelling in same house. One child dies in night when mother overlays it, she claims living child. They appeal to Solomon, who shows great wisdom in settling the argument.

I KINGS 3:16-28

"GIVE HER THE LIVING CHILD"

AFTER King Solomon had stood before the Ark of the Covenant at Jerusalem and had had a great feast for all his servants, there came before him two strange women. They were harlots, who dwelt in the same house. King Solomon, who presided over Israel with pomp and power, received these women as would a judge presiding over a court of justice.

Each had given birth to a son. One child had been born three days before the other. Like most infants of such a tender age, they looked much alike. The mothers probably appeared before Solomon dressed in the simple apparel of women of the servant class.

Quite in keeping with maternal love the real mother rushed excitedly before King Solomon and spoke in this manner: "And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house" (I Kings 3:18).

Lowering her voice, she said poignantly, "And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it" (I Kings 3:19). Excitement returning, she hastened to add, "And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom" (I Kings 3:20).

We can almost hear the anxious voice of this mother speaking and we can easily visualize the eager expression that came across her face as she continued her story: "And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear" (I Kings 3:21).

These touching words bespoke a real mother's love. Her instinct told her that the dead child was not her own. But now the other harlot interrupted the conversation to tell King Solomon her version of the story. "Nay; but the living is my son," she shouted, "and the dead is thy son" (I Kings 3:22).

King Solomon stood looking on, probably recalling that only a short time before he had asked God to give him an understanding heart to discern between good and bad (I Kings 3:9). And he did not forget that God had promised such spiritual discernment. Now with two harlots claiming the living baby, he needed it.

What fright must have come into the heart of the real mother. What boldness was yet there in the heart of the mother whose child was dead because she had overlaid it in the night.

A less wise person might have dismissed the case for want of real evidence, but Solomon, in his wisdom, devised a clever trick. He commanded an attendant to bring him a sword, and he held the sword in his hand. Surely there must have come across the face of the real mother an expression of fear and anxiety. Though she knew not what Solomon intended to do, as she watched him brandish the sword she must have thought of her child with even greater tenderness. Then she heard these fatal words from King Solomon's lips: "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other" (I Kings 3:25). The real mother hastened to say, "O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it." But the other said, "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it" (I Kings 3:26).

King Solomon now knew which was the real mother. The two mothers, by their very words, had revealed their identity.

We can imagine how grateful the real mother was as she reached for her child and held it again in her arms. We can see her tears turning to smiles, and know that the heaviness that had enveloped her heart was now replaced by joy.

The fame of King Solomon's wisdom, because of the verdict he had rendered in the case of the two mothers, now spread over Israel. Though the story is short, requiring only fourteen Bible verses for the narration, it has become the most frequently quoted example of Solomon's judicious judgment, and one of the Bible's most stirring examples of mother love put to a trying test.

THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

Comes from Saba to prove Solomon's wisdom and wealth. Brings with her a large retinue, also lavish gifts for Solomon. Art, music, and literature memorialize her. Jesus mentions her.

I KINGS 10:1, 4, 10, 13 II CHRON. 9:1, 3, 9, 12 MATT. 12:42

LUKE 11:31

SHE CAME TO PROVE

THE first reigning queen on record who pitted her wits and wealth against those of a king was the Queen of Sheba. She came to Jerusalem from her kingdom of Saba in southwestern Arabia to investigate all that she had heard about Solomon, Israel's wisest and wealthiest king. The real purpose of her visit was probably the trade zone demarcation and alliance she worked out with Solomon. Solomon's commercial expansion followed after her visit.

Rather startling it is to know that in this period of more than nine centuries before Christ Sabeans occupied as *high* a place as did the Queen of Sheba. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* states that "in almost all respects women appeared to have been considered the equal of men and to have discharged the same civil, religious and even military functions."

Great drama centers around the approximately 1,200-mile journey that the Queen of Sheba made by camel caravan from Arabia to Jerusalem. The journey probably took more time than is at present required to circle the world in a slow boat. That long, winding caravan, the queen riding on a camel with gold trappings studded with precious jewels, made its slow way probably through the Arabian Desert, across the land of Moab and into Jerusalem. This may have been one of the most imposing caravans ever to enter Jerusalem, for it is described as a "very great train, with camels that bore spices, and very much gold, and precious stones" (I Kings 10:2).

Let us suppose the Queen of Sheba brought with her also frankincense and myrrh, such as later were brought to the infant Jesus. Some interpreters point out that these may have come to Jesus from devout merchant princes from the Arabian spice and incense trade routes, for they, too, came out of the "east" to Bethlehem.

For many centuries the Queen of Sheba's visit has been a popular subject for the old masters. Rubens depicts her as an elegant, dignified woman, wearing apparel that was neither too costly nor gaudy. In Raphael's fresco in the Vatican she is depicted as having a girlish figure, entering Solomon's court in great haste and running up the steps of the dais to meet the king. Other artists, such as Sir E. J. Poynter, who painted her in 1891 and whose work is in the Gallery at Sydney, New South Wales, portray the Queen of Sheba as a woman splendidly attired and loaded with gorgeous jewels, typical of the wealth and magnificence of the land of southern Arabia from which she came.

Ancient Himyaritic inscriptions depict the fame of Saba. Pliny and Strabo, too, write of its culture and political power. The Old Testament mentions it in a number of passages, among which are Psalms 72:10, Isaiah 60:6, and Jeremiah 6:20.

The riches of this Sabeans' kingdom are evident from the Bible text centering around her, for she brought to Solomon 120 talents of gold (I Kings 10:10). That, according to Bible scholars, would be equivalent today to about \$3,600,000 in United States of America gold coin. Solomon's annual income at this time has been estimated at more than \$20,000,000, so what she brought was not out of keeping with what he had and what he in turn generously bestowed upon her. Their exchange of gifts is one of the first examples of good public relations for business purposes on record.

King Solomon derived a large part of his revenue from the traffic of spice merchants, tolls, dues, and iron and copper mines. He is said to have exceeded all monarchs of his time in wealth. The Queen of Sheba probably was a very wise woman herself and saw in her visit an opportunity for trade between her country and Israel. She was right; a new century of commercial expansion followed.

She was one of many rulers from far and wide who sought to learn about Solomon's wisdom. Others sent ambassadors, but she was the only one to go herself. She was a courageous, resourceful woman, who took an active part in increasing the prosperity of her own people. In this she was successful.

When she reached Jerusalem King Solomon's wisdom and the magnificence of his palace and other public buildings surpassed her expectations. After viewing all his splendor and receiving lavish gifts herself, she made the famous comment, "I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me" (I Kings 10:7).

She was impressed not only with Solomon's wisdom and ability to answer hard questions but, womanlike, with the magnificence of his buildings, the richness of the apparel worn by those in his court, and the elegance of his royal table. All drinking vessels, she noted, were of gold, and all the vessels of the house were of pure gold. Also, she admired greatly the well-ordered dignity of his court, the fine costumes of even his servants, and the splendor of the arched viaduct that led from his palace to the Temple.

"Blessed be the Lord thy God" (I Kings 10:9), the Queen of Sheba said to King Solomon. It is probable, as Jewish writers believe, that she was converted to the worship of the true God, but there is no record of her making a gift or offering in the Temple. Probably, coming as she did from an idolatrous country, whose chief god was Attar, she had only three things in mind—trade, culture, and worldly wisdom.

Many legends surround the Queen of Sheba's visit. There is one that she and Solomon had a love affair. Their son was said to have been named Menelek and it was thought that he migrated with his followers to Abyssinia. The present royal house of Abyssinia (Ethiopia) claims descent from Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, but there is no record of this in the Bible. The Book of Kings is frank about Solomon and his many wives. It says that he "loved many strange women, together with the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Zidonians, and Hittites" (I Kings 11:1), but the Queen of Sheba is not mentioned.

Other fantastic legends which gathered around her journey to the court of Solomon may be read in Sura 27 of the Koran. Mohammed himself, it is probable, derived his information from Jewish sources. Her visit, one of the most romantic in history, has also been dramatized in Karl Goldmark's well-known opera *The Queen of Sheba*, which makes frequent use of Biblical material. No reference to her has yet been found in the Sabeian inscriptions so far unearthed. But her visit was so well known to the people of Israel that the story of it was handed down even to Jesus' time, and his reference to her is recorded in Matthew 12:42 and Luke 11:31.

The Queen of Sheba, who came to prove, lives on now, nearly thirty centuries since her visit, as a woman whose spirit of adventure and whose resourcefulness, courage, and curiosity have not been surpassed by any queen in history. And certainly her sense of good public and international relations is unparalleled among women of the Bible.

CHAPTER 4

Women in an Era of Political Decline

JEZEBEL

Daughter of Zidonia and worshiper of Baal, she becomes wife of King Ahab of northern Israel. Attempts to force her lewd cult on his godly people. Persecutes prophets of God, including Elijah. He flees twice to wilderness. Her children rule wickedly after her husband is killed. She dies a horrible death.

I KINGS 16:31; 18:4, 13, 19 19:1, 2; 21:5, 7s 11, 14, 15, 23, 25 11 KINGS 9:7, 10, 22, 30, 36, 37

HER NAME IS A SYNONYM FOR WICKEDNESS

JEZEBEL'S degrading and idolatrous cult of Baal that she brought with her to Samaria, northern kingdom of Israel, from her native Zidonia about 869 B.C. ate like a cancer into the vital structure of the Hebrew religion during her more than three decades of power. Though the daughter of a king, the wife of a king, and the mother and grandmother of kings, she was neither a good wife and mother nor a just ruler. Her own father, Ethbaal, priest-king of Tyre, murdered his brother to become king. It is possible that Dido, founder of Carthage, was related to Jezebel, for Dido is thought to have been a princess of Tyre who at about this time led a group of colonists to north Africa.

Jezebel brought with her into Israel customs that were not only fearfully cruel but sensual and revolting. At her table no less than 450 priests of the great nature-god Baal were fed. Baal was believed to control the weather and to give or withhold fertility, while one of his consorts, Asherah, goddess of love, presided over temples which became centers of legalized vice. Jezebel introduced many of these temples into Israel.

According to the Deuteronomists, the great crime of Ahab of Israel was that he married this Phoenician princess Jezebel. Her elaborate, sensuous entourage introduced into Israel the lewd Baal worship which tended to destroy manhood and drag womanhood into shame.

When she tried to impose the materialistic and sensuous cult of her native Tyre upon Israel, she denied the ultimate value of spiritual victory and became the enemy of the one God, a God of purity, righteousness, law, and order.

In her evil power over her husband, Jezebel might be compared to Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. In her fanaticism, she might be likened to Mary, Queen of Scots. Her death, though far more bitter and bloody, suggests the death on the guillotine of another alien queen, Marie Antoinette. And like Catherine de' Medici, Jezebel is remembered as an outstanding example of what a woman ought not to be.

The young bride Jezebel entered Israel with every opportunity to do good, had she turned her forces in that direction. Dr. Edward B. Pollard, in *Oriental Women*, Volume IV of "Woman in All Ages and Countries," has suggested that the 45th Psalm was a Hebrew epithalamium, written in honor of Jezebel's marriage to Ahab. None of its ideals concerning the new-made queen was ever realized in Israel, for her marriage, instituting an alliance between her many gods and Ahab's one God, could bring nothing but corruption, dissension, and death.

Jezebel was such a domineering person that she soon became the master of her husband and in turn the despot of the nation. One of her first acts was to order the extermination of the prophets of the Lord (I Kings 18:4, 13). These were the prophets who were attached to various shrines (II Kings 2:3, 5) or who roamed the countryside (I Sam. 10:5-13). Her strongest enemy was the great prophet Elijah, who defied her to the end. By divine command he fled to the wilderness, only to return stronger in his knowledge of God and more determined to fight the evil cult of Baal.

During one of the periodic famines that cursed the land he pronounced that it was one of the direct cosmic consequences of Israel's sin. Jezebel, of course, was the sinister figure in that sin.

Becoming alarmed at the increasing dependence of the people in northern Israel upon idols, Elijah demanded a contest on Mount Carmel between the powers of Israel's God and the powers of Jezebel's god, Baal. One of the most dramatic struggles in history followed. The test was whether the priests of Baal could bring rain after the long drought; they failed. Elijah, who prayed to the omnipotent God, was victorious. Out of the heavens came an abundance of rain. Jezebel was so infuriated when her priests were defeated that she threatened Elijah's life. He fled from her wrath to the wilderness a second time.

She continued to dominate Israel from her ivory-decorated palace, built by her father-in-law Omri on a 400-foot hill of Jezreel. From its lofty tower she could command a view of prolific olive orchards that stretched in the valleys eastward to the Jordan. On beyond she could see the mountains of Gilead. Westward she could see the wide plain that ended at the foot of Mount Carmel. In this great panorama spreading before her was the vineyard of a man named Naboth.

King Ahab looked on this vineyard with envious eyes, because it adjoined his palace and he desired it for an herb garden. He tried to purchase the land from Naboth, but Naboth knew his rights under the law and firmly refused to sell it. Jezebel was incensed that her husband, a king, could not force his subject, a common man, to sell. "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel?" (I Kings 21:7), she exclaimed in contemptuous impatience. And when she saw how weak her husband was in asserting himself, she declared, "I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (I Kings 21:7).

Then Jezebel took the matter into her own hands. She wrote letters to the officials in her husband's name and sealed them with his seal. In these letters Jezebel arranged to have Naboth falsely accused of blasphemy against God and treason against the king. The bold, heartless Jezebel knew that the penalty for these crimes was stoning to death. Her letters were sent with the knowledge that her commands must be obeyed, and that Naboth would be taken out and stoned to death. This was done.

Confronting her husband, the king, Jezebel triumphantly declared, "Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money: for Naboth is not alive, but dead" (I Kings 21:15). Naboth's sons also were stoned to death. Now that there were no heirs, possession of the vineyard reverted to the king.

Jezebel had plotted treacherously to gain her way; but her highhanded action aroused the religious zeal and democratic fervor of Israel's common man, of whom the prophet Elijah became the aggressive leader. He took grave exception to what Jezebel had done and told King Ahab that he had sold himself to do evil in the sight of the Lord. He predicted that dogs would lick Ahab's blood in the very field which had been acquired from Naboth, and that Jezebel would be eaten by dogs (I Kings 21:23). Elijah also foretold that every member of the house of Ahab and Jezebel would be dishonored in death.

One would imagine that Jezebel would have been stricken with fear, but she had too much confidence in her own might and the power of her gods of evil. Some three years later, however, her husband was brought back from battle mortally wounded, and the dogs of Samaria did lick up his blood from his chariot.

Jezebel survived her husband for about ten years. As queenmother she continued to exert a malign influence over Israel, first through her eldest son Ahaziah, who was also a worshiper of Baal according to his mother's cult. But as Elijah had warned, Ahaziah was fatally injured by a fall from a window, after he had been king less than two years.

Jezebel's second son Jehoram came to power next and ruled seven years. During his rule Jehu, an army leader who had been commissioned by Elijah to overthrow the Ahab dynasty, came to Jehoram and announced there could be no peace in Israel "so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many" (II Kings 9:22). This son also was murdered by Jehu, who cast his body into the vineyard which had belonged to Naboth.

Jezebel faced the most gruesome death of all. From the tower of her palace one day she looked out and saw Jehu, the destroyer of her family, approaching. She knew her death was certain, so she adorned herself like the queen that she was. She "tired" her head with regal trappings. She took a paint made of a black lead-ore powder mixed with oil and applied this to her eyelids to make them appear lustrous. A queen to the last, she hoped that she might overawe Jehu.

As he entered the gate, she shouted down to him from her window the bitterest, most insulting taunt she could think of "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" (II Kings 9:31). Zimri had been another chariot captain who revolted against his king and set fire to the palace at Tirzah but died in the wreckage.

When Jehu raised his eyes to the palace window and saw the defiant queen sitting there like a tragedienne playing a part, he yelled to her eunuchs, "Who is on my side? who?" (II Kings 9:32). Probably hating their mistress as much as Jehu and his army hated her, they gladly complied with Jehu's order, "Throw her down" (II Kings 9:33). The painted queen, in her regal trappings, was tossed down to Jehu; her blood splattered the walls of her ivorycolored palace and the horses standing below, and Jehu's horse trod her under foot. Her thirty years of tyranny over Israel had ended.

Jehu went in and ate and drank and ordered that the cursed woman be buried, for after all she was a king's daughter. But when the attendants went out to bury her, they found no more of her than the skull and feet and the palms of her hands. As Elijah had declared, the dogs had eaten the flesh of this woman who typified government without God.

The final words spoken over this heathen queen's body were, "And the carcase of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel; so that they shall not say, this is Jezebel" (II Kings 9:37). The terror that had been visited upon her and her family was testimony to the Israelites that God's forces are always supreme.

Jezebel's evil lived after her. Her daughter, Athaliah, carried the fatal influence she had inherited from her mother into Judah, southern kingdom of Israel, when she became the wife of another Jehoram. After his death Athaliah's son, another Ahaziah, came to the throne; and when Jehu also killed him, Athaliah seized the government. She ruled only six years before she was supplanted by Joash and killed. When the horses trampled over her body, which lay just inside her palace gates, her fate was not unlike that of her mother, Jezebel.

That Jezebel's name made a deep impression upon the Hebrew mind may be traced in the Book of Revelation. A heretical and idolatrous influence is referred to as "That woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols" (Rev. 2:20).

Jezebel's name even appears in the dictionary as a term of reproach. It came into use in England during the sixteenth century when painting the face was accepted as prima-facie evidence that a woman had loose morals. Certainly no woman's name in history has become so commonly accepted as a synonym for wickedness.

WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

Elijah asks impoverished widow for cake. She willingly makes it for him from her last meal and oil, but her provisions do not fail through the year of drought that Elijah remains with her. He not only teaches her law of abundance but raises her son from the dead.

I KINGS 17:H-24 LUKE 4:25, 26

"SEE, THY SON LIVETH"

IN CONTRAST to the cruel and unscrupulous Jezebel, who had threatened to have the prophet Elijah slain, stood one obscure woman who opened her humble home to him. She was a nameless widow, identified only by the name of the town in which she lived in Phoenicia at Zarephath, eight miles south of Zidon on the road to Tyre.

The land had had two and a half years of drought, and the widow was hungry. So was her son. All she had left to eat was a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse. No doubt she was so low in spirit that the radiance had gone from her face and the quickness from her step; and she was so undernourished that her clothes must have hung loosely about her emaciated body.

While she was gathering sticks at the city gate, there came across her path Elijah, roughly clad in a garment of coarse camel's hair, girt with a leather girdle. He also wore the mantle of his prophetic office, and this probably attracted the immediate attention of this impoverished widow.

By divine direction Elijah had come to this woman from the brook of Cherith, where he had fled from Jezebel's wrath. He could have starved at Cherith, but God had supplied his every need, even in the midst of drought. He had drunk at the brook, and the ravens had brought him bread and flesh twice a day. But when the brook had dried up God had directed him to Zarephath, saying, "Behold, I have commanded a widow woman there to sustain thee" (I Kings 17:9). Because Elijah's own faith had been tested and because he had learned to believe so firmly in God's sustaining power, he was able to approach the widow of Zarephath with the positive assurance that God could supply all her needs, even in the midst of famine.

"Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink" (I Kings 17:10), he called to her. And as she started forth in search of water in this dry land, he afterwards called to her, "Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand" (I Kings 17:11).

Then it was that the widow unburdened her heart to the prophet, saying she had only a handful of meal in a barrel and a little oil in a cruse. "Behold, I am gathering two sticks," she said, "that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die" (I Kings 17:12).

Though she was greatly discouraged, Elijah came to her with a message of faith and hope. "Fear not," he spoke firmly; "go and do as thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son" (I Kings 17:13). What a test of self-denial for a hungry mother, who probably was even more conscious of her son's hunger. What a test also of her faith!

Proving equal to such a great test, she yielded to Elijah's command that he himself should be fed first from her scanty store. She made a cake as he had requested, probably a hoecake or corn cake, using the meal in the barrel, mixing it with the oil in the cruse and with hot water, and then frying it in oil. In return for her obedience to the prophet's command, she was to know the fulfillment of the prophet's promise uttered in the name of God, that neither the barrel of meal nor the cruse of oil would be exhausted before the drought ended, but there would be a plentiful supply for a full year for herself and son and the prophet.

Even in the midst of drought, the widow of Zarephath was to experience the continual miracle of nature in all its abundance. And she would be the center of this miracle, first because she had been willing to give all she had and next because she was willing to believe there would be more.

The wonder of it all was that this widow, though humble and impoverished, had been willing to accept from the prophet a knowledge of God, which Jezebel, a proud and merciless queen, had fought so bitterly. A queen would go down to her death fighting God, while a widow, a Phoenician too, would come back to health and plenty because she had faith to believe in God.

After the widow had demonstrated her faith in God's providence, she was to be tested again. This time her son was taken mortally ill and "there was no breath left in him" (I Kings 17:17). Probably he died of a disease caused by the malnutrition he suffered before Elijah came. The widow's faith, not yet strong enough to stand up against such a test, wavered. Bitterly upbraiding Elijah, she said, "What have I to do with thee, O thou man of God? art thou come unto me to call my sin to remembrance, and to slay my son?" (I Kings 17:18). Then it was that this prophet of God, who later would hand down his knowledge of healing to another great prophet, Elisha, proved God's healing power.

"Give me thy son" (I Kings 17:19), he first demanded. And he took the boy from his mother and went alone with him into an upper room and prayed fervently to God. Elijah, stretching himself on the child three times, cried, "O Lord my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again" (I Kings 17:21).

Afterward Elijah brought the child to his mother, saying, "See, thy son liveth" (I Kings 17:23). Another miracle had taken place in the home of the widow of Zarephath. The prophet who had demonstrated to her the law of abundance had also miraculously demonstrated God's power to heal. In both miracles the Phoenician woman had been brought to a clearer knowledge of God's goodness. She could now assert with firmer faith, "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is truth" (I Kings 17:24).

With Elijah as her teacher, she had learned how to conquer negation, how to rise out of limiting beliefs, how to walk free, strong, and unafraid. He had helped her to understand that God is known only as He reveals Himself, and that faith is the key to His revelation.

Jesus, preaching at Nazareth nine centuries later, would refer to the story of Elijah's healing of the son of the widow of Zarephath (Luke 4:25, 26). And a short time after this message, Jesus himself would raise from the dead the only son of another widow, who lived at Nain (Luke 7:11-15).

The widow of Zarephath, however, was the first woman on record to know the meaning of those glorious words, "See, thy son liveth." Only a woman who comes to know that God sustains, controls, guides, and is omnipotent can be the center of a miracle of healing and of abundance.

THE SHUNAMMITE

Offers hospitality of her home to prophet Elisha. Turns over upper room to him. He tells her she shall have a son in due time. Child, at about age twelve, is stricken while in field with father and dies in mother's arms. Without telling anyone she hastens to Elisha for help. He returns and raises child from dead. During a famine Elisha urges her to take her child and go to Phoenicia. She remains away seven years. Home restored to her by king after being seized during her absence.

THE GREAT WOMAN

IN THE King James Version of the Bible the Shunammite woman is called great (II Kings 4:8). This undoubtedly means that she was a wealthy and influential woman, but her story shows that she was great in other ways also—in her faith, her wisdom, and her silence. Living as she did at Shunem, a village on the edge of the rich grain fields of Esdraelon, she has come to be known as the Shunammite.

History had been made on the site of her home. Here on the ground she walked daily King Saul and his son Jonathan had been killed in battle. Here also the soldiers of Israel had won mighty victories against the Philistines. Elijah, the prophet of the "still small voice," often was seen to pass by on the road in front of her house, a road that led from Nazareth across the Plain of Esdraelon to Jerusalem. Probably she had heard of Elisha, upon whom Elijah's mantle had fallen. She knew that this man of God, as he had come to be known by the people, had increased the oil in the jars and vessels of the widow of one of the prophets, who had then been able to pay her debts. This and other miracles, no doubt, had brought wonder to the mind of the Shunammite, who was particularly receptive to God's word.

It is quite evident that she was a woman of property, a leader in her community, one who reached out hands to bestow kindness upon rich and poor alike. Little is said of her husband. We do know that he was old (II Kings 4:14), probably much older than she was. From the story, however, we later can see that he had confidence in his wife's judgment and bestowed upon her all the good things of life.

Because their home was one of the most inviting places on the outskirts of Shunem, we can imagine that the traveler, like Elisha, would like to pause there and refresh himself. One day the Shunammite shared bread with Elisha, and after that he stopped often at her home when he came that way. Finally she said to her husband, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither" (II Kings 4:9-10).

The upper room that the Shunammite prepared for Elisha was reached by an outer stairway from the garden. Cool, quiet, and private, it became a favorite retreat for the prophet when he visited neighboring towns. Let us imagine that sweet-smelling balm perfumed it, bright-colored coverings were on the bed; and on the table was kept, let us suppose, wine, oil, honey, and dates. Often the Shunammite, we can be sure, would serve Elisha fish, bread made of meal, oil, and water, and milk from her own goats.

A man who breathed a spirit of soothing, healing beneficence wherever he walked, Elisha often came to Shunem. He was a man who enjoyed the comforts of a home and who liked people. This family, in turn, was blessed to have as their guest the prophet, who was known for his work all over the northern kingdom.

One day Elisha asked his hospitable hostess what could be done to repay her. But she made it dear that she was not seeking honor or recognition or favors from him. Then Elisha discussed the matter with Gehazi, his servant. Gehazi reminded Elisha that the woman had no son, the sacred desire of every God-loving woman in Israel. Elisha said, "Call her" (II Kings 4:15). Then Gehazi called the Shunammite and she stood in the doorway of the guest chamber. Elisha told her that when spring came around again she would embrace a son. Probably she had been barren so long that she could scarcely comprehend what she had been told; but she did conceive and bore a son the next spring.

Can we not imagine the mother's strong affection for the son who came through the blessing of the great prophet? And would it not be natural to suppose that such an unexpected blessing increased her adoration for God?

Several years passed, maybe ten or twelve. The Bible gives us no record other than that one day the boy went out among the reapers with his father. It was the harvest season, and the whole valley around the village glowed like a furnace in the intense heat. Not a breath of air was stirring, and not a leaf moved in the trees. Even the sand was parched and stung like hot ashes to the bare feet.

The child had not been long in the heat of the sun before he complained to his father, "My head, my head" (II Kings 4:19). The father, turning to his servant, said, "Carry him to his mother" (II Kings 4:19).

Until noon she held him on her lap, but he grew worse and died, probably of a sunstroke. Though confronted with the death of her only son, this mother's trust in God became surmure. Acting quickly, she carried her son up the outside staircase, entered the prophet's chamber, and placed the lifeless body upon the bed. No murmur of complaint, no loud wailing escaped her lips. She did not even call loudly to her husband, but kept silent until she could go to the prophet.

In all likelihood she recalled the story of how Elijah had raised from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath. The Shunammite believed her lifeless son could in like manner be the center of a miracle. So firmly did she trust in the healing power of God, and in Elisha's ability to bring it forth, that not once did she say, "My son is dead."

Elisha, she knew, was not subject to doubt and fear but could bring life back into her son's body. So she hurried up the steep slope of Mount Carmel. To her servant she said nothing, except, "Drive, and go forward" (II Kings 4:24). That literally was what she was doing herself, driving forward in faith, never for one moment faltering or doubting.

As Elisha saw the Shunammite approaching from the distance, he said to Gehazi, "Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: Run now, I pray thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child?" (II Kings 4:25-26).

The remarkable faith of this mother in God's power to heal found expression in her calm answer, "It is well." And she rushed to kneel and touch Elisha's feet. As Gehazi, evidently wanting to protect his master, tried to push her away, Elisha sensed that the woman needed him. And he spoke: "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me" (II Kings 4:27). Still not confirming the death of her son, she answered Elisha, saying, "Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me?" (II Kings 4:28).

Hurriedly ordering Gehazi to take his staff and go to the child, Elisha understood the seriousness of the situation, especially when the Shunammite further implored, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee" (II Kings 4:30). Elisha arose and followed her.

Gehazi hastened ahead with Elisha's staff and placed it upon the face of the child, but there was no sound or sign of life. When Elisha, traveling more slowly, finally came to the child, he went into the room alone, shut the door, and prayed solemnly to God. Like Elijah, who had stretched himself upon the child of the widow of Zarephath, Elisha, too, stretched himself upon the child until his flesh was warm. When the child had sneezed and opened his eyes, the prophet summoned Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite" (II Kings 4:36).

Seeing that her child breathed, smiled, and stretched out his arms to her once more, the Shunammite fell at Elisha's feet powerless, voiceless, and conscious only that her child lived again. The prophet, who had lived in a spirit of victory, had given her a wonderful demonstration of a spiritual victory.

Later, when famine was spreading in the direction of the rich grain country of Shunem, Elisha warned the Shunammite to leave her home and to go to the land of the Philistines with her son, so as to escape the great desolation of drought. The prophet had come from Samaria only a short time before, and so great was the famine there that some of the people had turned to cannibalism.

Elisha, knowing that food was so scarce that an ass's head had sold for fourscore pieces of silver, stopped by the house of the Shunammite to warn her and her son of the approaching famine. (There is no record of the father. Probably he had died by this time.) The Shunammite quickly did as Elisha had directed and did not look back upon the comforts she left behind, but pressed on with her son to the land of the Philistines.

Her move is but briefly told in the first two verses of II Kings 8. In the very next verse we learn that the Shunammite returned to her home seven years later, only to find that her house and land had been confiscated. Again she kept her silence until she could appear in person before King Jehoram.

At the moment that Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored a dead body to life, the Shunammite walked in. This, explained Gehazi, is the woman whose son was raised from the dead. "Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now" (II Kings 8:6), the king ordered.

From the beginning to this dramatic conclusion, the Shunammite's life is an example of victorious living. Her peculiar charm is her serenity in moments of trial, her firmness in affliction, her calm yet energetic prosecution of her son's rights before the king, and her unselfish endurance, amid anxiety and anguish. She won every claim to greatness, because at the sudden death of her only son she could go forward and seek the man of God, who she knew could heal her son. And when he asked how it was with the child, she could answer, "It is well."

In the gallery of Bible women there is no better example of positive faith. The Shunammite did not allow negative ideas to enter her mind because she had such sublime confidence in the power of God.

ATHALIAH

Daughter of Jezebel and wife of Jehoram, king of Judah. Her son succeeds father to throne. When son is murdered she usurps throne, first destroying all but one of royal of House of Judah. She reigns six years. Is murdered and trampled upon by horses.

II KINGS 8:26; 11:1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 20

II CHRON. 22:2, 10, 11, 12; 23:12, 13, 21; 24:7

ONLY WOMAN EVER TO RULE OVER JUDAH

WOMEN are ever extreme; they are better or they are worse than men," history has often testified. Athaliah, the only woman ever to sit on the throne of David and rule, was the extreme in wickedness.

Evil ran in her veins. She was the granddaughter of Omri, who waded through slaughter to a throne he never inherited. She was the daughter of Ahab, the legitimate successor of his unscrupulous father, and of Jezebel, whose name is synonymous with wickedness. Reared in the northern kingdom of Israel, at Samaria, where the palace of her parents was surrounded by groves and idols of Baal worship, Athaliah grew up in an atmosphere that completely denied the one God. Because of the lewd cult worship of Baal, introduced by her mother, the kingdom was swept by immorality and godlessness.

Athaliah, probably for political expediency, was married to Jehoram, eldest son of the pious Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. She went with him to Jerusalem, capital of the southern kingdom. When he was thirty-two years old, he came to the throne, and Athaliah sat beside him. Just as her mother had done when she came to Samaria from Tyre, Athaliah promoted her Baal worship among the people. Because her husband's brothers were loyal to the faith of their nation, King Jehoram had them murdered. Athaliah, much more determined in character than her husband was, probably instigated these murders.

Jehoram reigned eight years and died unmourned of an incurable disease foretold by Elijah. The Philistines had captured all his secondary wives and sons, except Ahaziah, Athaliah's own son, who now came to the throne. As queen-mother, Athaliah was more powerful than ever. Her son was young and she had had the experience of dictating through her husband. We have the record that Ahaziah "walked in the ways of the house of Ahab: for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly" (II Chron. 22:3).

Within a year Athaliah's son was wounded in his chariot by Jehu, commissioned by Elijah to overthrow the dynasty of Athaliah's father. Her son escaped to Megiddo, where he died. Athaliah seized the throne and resolved to destroy "all the seed royal," her own blood relations, among whom were her own grandchildren. Had one of these young princes become king, her place as queen-mother would have been usurped. She also knew that if she had the power of chief ruler she could further promote her Baal worship.

Judah had six years of unrighteous government under Athaliah. From II Chronicles 24:7 we can assume that she even had a portion of the Temple of Jehovah pulled down. And she used the material in the building of a temple of Baal.

Fortunately for the kingdom of Judah, Jehosheba, her stepdaughter, had rescued Joash, one of the royal infants, from her bloody massacre at the time she came to the throne. Jehosheba had hidden the child for six years, and at the proper time her husband, the high priest Jehoiada, brought forth the lad, now seven years of age. With the aid of mighty men, he proclaimed him king.

When Queen Athaliah heard the people celebrating the young king's accession in the temple, she went there and screamed, "Treason, Treason" (II Chron. 23:13). The high priest ordered that she be slain, not in the house of the Lord, but after she had left it. She was therefore slain as she was entering the horses' gate by the palace, close by the Temple.

The horses trampled over her body where she lay dead at the gates. In her miserable end, Athaliah bore a singular resemblance to her mother Jezebel, who was abandoned to the dogs. Athaliah was left in a horse-path, to be trampled upon. Like her mother she died a queen, but without a hand to help her or an eye to pity her.

The final Biblical record alludes to Athaliah as "that wicked woman" (II Chron. 24:7). Jean Baptiste Racine's tragedy *Athalie*, written at the instigation of Madame de Maintenon and first performed at Versailles in 1690, is based on the life of this wicked queen, who lived the latter part of the eighth century before Christ.

HULDAH

A Hebrew prophetess to whom King Josiah sent his high priest Hilkiah to ask concerning the book found in the Temple. She tells him that, because of idolatry, Jerusalem will be destroyed. She prophesies that King Josiah will be spared.

II KINGS 22:14 II CHRON. 34:22

"THUS SAITH THE LORD"

THOUGH many of the Hebrews were given to idolatry and were ignorant of God, still the lamp of divine truth was kept burning in the heart of a woman. That woman was Huldah.

To a high degree, Huldah possessed two great qualities, righteousness and prophetic insight, and because she possessed the former she was able to use the latter wisely. This prophetic power, never trusted to the undeserving, was given to her because she loved God with all her heart.

Evidently Huldah was known in the kingdom of Judah far and wide or she would never have been sought out by King Josiah, who sent five of his own personal messengers to her with the Book of the Law, which had been recently discovered during repairs in the Temple at Jerusalem. He had faith in Huldah's spiritual powers and he wanted her to tell him whether the book was genuine or not. Here is a clue to Huldah's intellectual and spiritual perception.

The Scriptures give us no graphic description of this early Hebrew prophetess, except to say that she was the wife of Shallum, whose family had been singled out as keepers of the wardrobe, meaning either the priest's or the king's wardrobe, probably the latter. At least this would place her close to life inside the palace and Temple. The King James Version says that Huldah "dwelt in Jerusalem in the college," but the Revised Standard Version says "she dwelt in the Second Quarter" (II Kings 22:14), indicating the area of Jerusalem in which she lived. On some maps the Second Quarter is shown to be the section in front of the Temple. Jewish tradition has it that Huldah taught publicly in a school. Other tradition has it that she taught and preached to women.

We can justly infer that she was a woman of distinction. Among the messengers that King Josiah sent to her were his high priest, Hilkiah, who had found hidden away this amazing roll of manuscript, the lost Book of the Law, the brilliant work of a group of prophets and priests who had recorded the Yahwistic spiritual ideals. Another messenger was Shaphan, the scribe in the temple, to whom Hilkiah had first taken the lost book. Parts of this book are still found in Deuteronomy. It is now thought to be the first book of the Bible that was canonized.

Only a deeply devout woman, one of real intellectual attainments, would have been sought out by a king and a priest to give her opinion as to whether or not this scroll was indeed the word of the Lord. It turned out to be one of the most important scrolls in the history of Israel.

Huldah not only confirmed its authenticity but also prophesied concerning the future, saying that the Lord would bring evil upon Judah, because the people had forsaken Him and had turned instead to images. As a reward for Josiah's humility and tender heart, Huldah prophesied that he would be gathered unto his fathers before this terrible doom came upon Israel.

Commentators have questioned why King Josiah sent his personal messengers to consult a woman. Why were they not sent to a man? Josiah, who had come to rule at age eight, doubtless had learned to rely a great deal on his mother Jedidah as queen-mother.

We know little about her, but we do know that Josiah's father Amon was murdered in his own palace by his servants because of his idolatry. But King Josiah centralized religion at Jerusalem, exalted the Levites, threw out the shrines of the false gods, and led his people to new spiritual heights. We naturally assume that the godly Josiah had a godly mother. Because of her, he would have a sympathetic appreciation of a woman as righteous and as spiritually discerning as Huldah?

Noteworthy it is that in the short account of Huldah's prophecy the scribe repeated four times her phrase, "Thus saith the Lord," making us know that Huldah did not think of herself as an oracle, but only as a channel through which God's word came.

Huldah's prophecy gave King Josiah greater courage to put into action the laws written in the Book of the Law, which had been sent to her for verification. After this, Josiah had the scroll read in the house of the Lord and made a covenant to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments. And because of it, he fought evil in Judah more zealously.

High regard he had for Huldah's prophecy when he acted so promptly, and when he also sought to make himself more worthy of the promised forbearance of God, though he knew the threatened evil to his country and his people could not be averted.

Only a woman who studied immutable spiritual laws and who prayed unceasingly could have been given insight into the mystery of the future. But Huldah was a woman who could throw back the veil of Israel's future because she had lived so close to God.

ESTHER

Name appears 55 times in ten chapters of Old Testament book bearing her name.

From throngs of virgins, Esther is chosen to be wife of King Ahasuerus of Persia. She succeeds Queen Vashti, who has been deposed. She averts a general massacre of her race planned by the wicked Haman, prime minister. Her service to her people gives rise to Feast of Purim.

"FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS"

THE Book of Esther, one of only two books in the Old Testament bearing the name of the woman around whom the narrative centers, opens in all the oriental splendor of an Arabian Nights tale. Some scholars call it a historical novel; others term it a festal legend.

The setting is Persia, and Esther becomes the first notable woman in the Bible who lived outside Palestine, though she was of a noble Jewish family carried into captivity when Nebuchadnezzar reduced Jerusalem to what Isaiah has called a wilderness of thorns and briars.

Esther is the central figure in what is one of the most controversial books in the Old Testament, because not once does the name of God appear in it. But its significance and importance to Jewish history stems from the fact that it has become a patriotic symbol to a persecuted people of the ultimate triumph of truth and justice. And the courage of Esther becomes the dominating factor in the salvation of her people.

Many authorities agree that the governing purpose of the Book of Esther is to explain and justify the celebration of the Feast of Purim, observed in March by the Jews. Though the author of the Book of Esther is not known, historians confirm the fact that he showed an amazingly accurate knowledge of Persian palaces and customs, and critics place his work among the masterpieces of literature. None of the characters is more skillfully presented than is Esther herself.

Like many great characters in history, Esther makes her first appearance as one of the humblest of figures, an orphan Jewess. But four years later she rises to the position of a queen of amazing power, a power which she manages to use wisely.

The setting where she is placed is the sumptuous palace of the Persian Empire in the time of Artaxerxes II (404-358 B.C.). The curtains were fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and pillars of marble. The beds were of gold and silver, upon a pavement of red, blue, white, and black marble. The wine was served in vessels of gold and flowed in abundance. All of this is vividly described in Esther 1:6, 7.

The ancient writer's estimate of Esther's importance to the story becomes apparent, for in this short Bible book her name appears fifty-five times. The name of no other woman in the Bible is recorded so often. Only Sarah, whose name appears as Sarah thirty-five times and as Sarai sixteen times, comes near to approaching this record.

The queen who preceded Esther was Vashti, respected as a woman of nobility and honor and one who had the courage to refuse an unjust command from her husband. After much feasting and drinking, he had commanded seven eunuchs to bring Queen Vashti before him so that he might show the princes her beauty. That was during a palace feast. Vashti refused. The king became so incensed that he issued an order that her royal position be given to another.

Vashti's refusal opened the way for the coming of Esther, who had been reared by her cousin Mordecai, a Benjamite official at the palace gate. He had seen the king's royal notice that beautiful young virgins would be assembled for the king's harem in Shushan, and that the maiden who pleased the king would take the place of Vashti. So it was that Mordecai sent forth his lovely cousin Esther.

Of all the maidens gathered in Shushan, Hadassah—that was Esther's Hebrew name—was perhaps the only one who worshiped the true God, though this fact is never mentioned. Educated as a daughter in the house of Mordecai, a wise and devout Israelite, she had probably learned from him the glorious truths about God treasured by her people. In that throng of virgins, she may have been the only one who had not worshiped idols or some of the many heathen gods. From her infancy, devout Jewess that she was, she probably had bowed her knee to Jehovah, and in this rich Persian kingdom she was in touch with a power not counted in terms of marble or gold or silver.

When she was presented to the king, he loved her above all the women who had been brought before him, and he set the royal crown upon her head. After she became queen, her name was changed from Hadassah, meaning "myrtle," to Esther, meaning "star." And she soon played a stellar role in the lives of her people, who were threatened with destruction. Early she dedicated herself, not to the pleasure, comforts, and luxuries of a palace, but to the dreams, hopes, and ambitions of her people.

When Esther became queen, King Ahasuerus had no idea that she was a Jewess. He had been attracted to her because of her surpassing loveliness, and he celebrated her entrance into the court with a great feast, which introduced her as queen of one of the most powerful empires in the world.

Let us picture her, if we may, as she moved about this magnificent palace with grace and dignity, wearing robes of gold and purple and handsome jewels which set off to advantage her garlanded black hair, olive skin, and eyes radiant because of all the wonder that now stretched before her. We can imagine she soon felt that she had been placed upon this high pedestal, not because of an accident, but for a great purpose.

Queen Esther soon gained favor with the people when she showed that she had sound judgment, fine self-control, and the ability to think of others first. It was not long before she learned that Haman, her husband's favorite, hated her people and demanded that they bow down to him. This Haman has been described by modern Jewish writers as a typical Hitler, manifesting so intense a hatred that it became an evil intent on destroying a God-fearing people. Opposed to such powers of evil as Haman possessed stood the courageous Esther, ready to defend her people even with her own life.

When her maids and eunuchs brought her word of a serious feud between her cousin Mordecai and Haman, she was deeply distressed. She knew she must act promptly and wisely. Soon she received a message from her cousin placing upon her this great responsibility: "Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). Challenging words these were for a young, inexperienced queen.

Her triumphant place in the hearts of her people became assured because she accepted her own divine destiny. Quietly she issued orders that all Jews in Shushan hold a fast in her behalf, and she joined them in this fast, which in itself suggested Esther's strong belief in prayer.

Following the fast, she prepared to go before her husband and intercede for her people. If the king, a capricious man, was in a good mood, she might gain her point; if not, she could lose her cause and also her own life.

As Esther made ready to appear before the king, one of the most courageous assertions made by a woman in the Bible is credited to her. "So I will go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), she said. Here is a woman who had not only high courage but sincere faith and a devotion to the cause of her people.

Also she had exhibited real loyalty in her co-operation with her cousin Mordecai, who had reared her and was largely responsible for the fact that she now sat on the throne of Persia. The king's affection she seemed also to have won wholeheartedly. As she appeared before him in her most royal apparel, his first tender words to her were, "What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be even given thee to the half of the kingdom" (Esther 5:3).

Prudent as well as fearless, Queen Esther knew that, though she had won her husband's love and confidence, she was dealing with powerful and sinister forces. It was best to move slowly with the king.

She answered him saying that she had one request, and that was that he join Haman with her for dinner. The king ordered that Haman be brought quickly. The latter was elated because he was sure he was now in the good graces of the queen as well as the king. It would be easy to do away with his enemy Mordecai. Haman rushed home and bragged to his wife Zeresh and friends about his invitation from the queen. They told him that now was the time for him to protest against Mordecai. "Why not," they asked, "prepare a gallows on which to hang Mordecai?"

Still proud of himself, Haman proceeded with a merry heart to Queen Esther's banquet. Providence was on the queen's side. After the banquet the king could not sleep. He called for the book of memorable deeds. There he found written the story that Mordecai had saved his life earlier from two palace eunuchs who had plotted to destroy him and that Mordecai had never been rewarded for the deed.

The next morning Haman was waiting in the court for an audience with the king, and his mission was to request the king to hang Mordecai. Haman had a surprise awaiting him. He learned that the king desired to pay honor to Mordecai.

At a second banquet to which Haman had been invited by Queen Esther, again she was asked by her husband what he could do for her. And she fell at his feet with tears in her eyes, telling him, "We are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish" (Esther 7:4). Then turning she said, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman" (Esther 7:6). And at that moment he sat in the banquet room as their guest, but

he now humbled himself before Esther, begging for his life. It was too late. The king was indignant. He ordered that Haman be hanged on the gallows that had been prepared for Esther's cousin, Mordecai.

After that Esther won even greater confidence from the king. He turned over to her the House of Haman and held out to her the golden scepter. Again exhibiting solicitude for the permanent protection of her people, she was instrumental in having it written into the law that the Jews not only could defend themselves but could slay their enemies.

Esther has often been criticized for this, but it must be remembered that she was dealing with an implacable enemy. Moreover, she was seeking security for her people and not for herself.

The Jews, then in Persia, celebrated their deliverance from the wholesale massacre that had been planned by Haman. And they called the celebration a Purim Festival, because Haman had cast pur (a lot) to ascertain a favorable day for carrying out his plot to destroy the Jews.

To this day the Purim Festival is celebrated on the fourteenth and fifteenth of March when the Roll of Esther is read in Jewish synagogues all over the world. Queen Esther's last decree was that this feast be held annually, "and it was written in the book" (Esther 9:32). It became a law that stands even today.

Esther herself lives on in the hearts of her people and is still commemorated at the Purim Festival as the woman who rose up as a savior of those Jews who were refugees in Persia about twenty-four centuries ago. She has become one of their greatest heroines because she served with fearlessness, intelligence, deep insight, and prudence.

Her name has been immortalized in art by Gottlieb Bierman, Julius Schrader, Tintoretto, and others; in literature by Jean Baptiste Racine, who wrote a play based upon her life, and in music by Handel, who composed an oratorio with the English words from Racine's *Esther*. In Windsor Castle also are fine Gobelin tapestries depicting Esther's dramatic story.

THE VIRTUOUS WOMAN

The glories of a good woman are skillfully portrayed in these twenty-two verses. Preceding chapters admonish against a woman who is not virtuous;

PROV. 31:10-31

HER PRICE IS FAR ABOVE RUBIES

NOTHING can add to the sheer beauty of the Bible portrait of the virtuous woman, though an entire sermon could be preached on each single phrase about her. Summarizing as it does the most noble attributes of the wife and mother, this is literature's most perfect picture of the ideal woman.

Her chastity, her charity, her diligence, her efficiency, her earnestness, her love for her husband and children, even her business foresight, are brilliantly illuminated in words that rise up majestically from the page. But the light in all its effulgence shines upon her godliness. This quality, the Bible seems to say, is what gives meaning, purpose, and direction to her life.

Many of the verses in the Book of Proverbs, of which this is the conclusion, are written in the style of the parent talking to a son just reaching manhood. It is as though a mother and a father instruct their son in practical piety. Like the refrain in a song, "my son, my son" appears eighteen times, and you can almost hear the mother's ejaculatory prayer as she counsels with her son. Such admonitions as "My son, attend unto my wisdom" or "My son, give me thine heart, fear thou the Lord, be wise, and make my heart glad" appear over and over again.

The son is warned, for example, against the "strange woman," who is likened to a "narrow pit" and who has lips that are "as an honeycomb" and a mouth that is "smoother than oil." He is warned also against the "fair woman which is without discretion," described as a "jewel of gold in a swine's snout."

Strong warnings also are given against the "foolish woman," depicted as "clamorous, simple, and knowing nothing," against the "contentious and angry woman," also the "adulterous woman," the "brawling woman" and the "whorish woman." "It is better to dwell in a corner of the housetop, than with a brawling woman in a wide house," says one Proverb. "It is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman," says another. In one bold stroke, we are told that the "adulterous woman" "will hunt for [his] life."

Then finally, coming to a brilliant climax, like the overpowering finale in a symphony, this mother admonishes her son to be wise and to listen to the praise of a good wife. So inspiring is the passage in the King James Version that we shall not try to add to or take from it.

"Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies," it begins. And then it continues:

The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil.

She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life.

She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar.

She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens.

She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night.

She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff.

She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy.

She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land.

She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant.

Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness.

She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness.

Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her.
Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellent them all.
Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.
Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates.

Here we see a woman who uses her time wisely, who richly provides for the growing needs of her family, and who continually seeks to build her spiritual resources so as to be prepared for any emergency. We see, too, a woman who shows skill in all her household tasks, who aids the needy, who guards her tongue, and who has dignity of character. Because of all these qualities, her husband "is known in the gates," and her children call her blessed.

Verbs in the passage are especially meaningful. The virtuous woman, for example, "seeketh," "riseth," "girdeth," "maketh," "openeth," and "looketh."

Thirteen out of the twenty-two verses begin with the pronoun "She," thus placing emphasis on the woman herself. Matthew Henry, the famous English Biblical commentator (1662-1714), likened this portrait of the virtuous woman to a mirror in which all women can examine themselves, though few will find their likeness. But the woman who looks in the mirror there will catch something of the beauty of spirit and the serenity of the virtuous woman.

She has been a source of inspiration to women for more than two thousand years, and her ideals are as faithfully applicable to this generation as they were to the generations of long ago.

A singular thing about these twenty-two verses on the virtuous woman is that in the Hebrew they form an acrostic. That is, each verse begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet in order, beginning with aleph, beth, gimel, dalet, and so on. Because of its alphabetical acrostic form these twenty-two verses have been called "the ABC of the Perfect Wife."

Since this passage is found at the end of a chapter whose title mentions King Lemuel and his mother, the questions often have been asked, Who was this King Lemuel? Who was his mother? Neither has ever been satisfactorily identified.

Tradition attributes the writing of Proverbs to Solomon. If this were so, this chapter might draw its inspiration from the wise counsel of Solomon's own mother Bath-sheba. But modern scholars do not accept this theory. They look upon Proverbs as embodying not only the wisdom of Solomon but that of many old Hebrew sages.

The story of the virtuous woman fittingly ends the study of the great women of the Old Testament. Though this good wife was not a real woman but an ideal one, she does typify almost all the admirable qualities of the actual women of Hebrew history.

Centuries later, at the beginning of the New Testament, comes Mary, Mother of Jesus, who more than any woman in the Bible embodies all the best qualities of womanhood. We see clearly that the virtuous woman of Proverbs was a motivating force in the refined and enlightened society of her day. As woman goes so the world goes. In the new Christian community that was to come, Mary, the Mother of Jesus, would be a radiant center.

CHAPTER 5

Women in Christ's Time

MARY, MOTHER OF JESUS

Angel Gabriel appears to Mary at Nazareth and announces she is to have a son. She hastens to Judaea to be with her cousin Elisabeth, also with child. After three months Mary returns to Joseph. They travel to Bethlehem where Jesus is born and Wise Men come. After her purification she and Joseph take Jesus to Temple and offer Him to Lord. Mary is with Jesus at Marriage at Cana; she also stands with 'I other women at Crucifixion. Later she helps establish His church.

MATT. 1:16, 18, 20 2:11; 13:55

MARK 6:3

LUKE 1:27, 30, 34, A 39, 41, A 56; 2:5, 16, 19, 34

ACTS 1:14

"BLESSED AMONG WOMEN"

As the mother of Jesus Christ, Mary stands apart from all women;] in history. In art, music, and literature she has become the embodiment of all that is fine and noble in womanhood. Even to unbelievers she is the subject of adoration. No woman in the entire history of the world has been so honored and revered.

The world's most majestic poems, novels, and plays have had Mary and her son as their central figures. In the most magnificent cathedrals she is depicted on canvas, in stained-glass windows, in bronze, marble, and stone. Through the centuries the most triumphant hymns and the best-loved carols, lullabies, and folk songs have told of her pre-eminence among women.

Adoration of her is ageless, classless, raceless, and timeless. Each nation where the Christian message lives thinks of both the Madonna and the Child as their own. Her face may carry the features of the southern European in one great painting, the Ethiopian in another, and the oriental in another. We find great representations of the Madonna up and down Europe, Asia, Africa, North America, South America-in fact everywhere that the New Testament has shed its light.

Many names of praise, such as "Mother of Mercy," "Mother Most Blessed," "Queen of Heaven," "Mother Most Pure," "Virgin Most Powerful," and "Spiritual Vessel," have been bestowed upon her. The angel Gabriel and her cousin Elisabeth said of her: "Blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28, 42).

Yet her greatness had a humble beginning. She was an obscure peasant girl living in Nazareth twenty centuries ago. But her story has spread to the ends of the earth. Though her life came to its tragic yet glorious climax at the foot of the cross, it continues to inspire and uplift millions. Though she reared her son in obscurity and had neither wealth nor acclaim, the world has worshiped at her feet all down the centuries.

Though Mary herself never wore fine clothes, the Madonnas through the ages have been draped in the most costly of garments, and people have left at her feet the world's most precious jewels. Though she never exalted herself, literature has raised her to the highest pinnacle of any woman in history. Though she never entered a palace, her picture has graced the most magnificent palaces. Though she never traveled any farther than from Palestine to Egypt, and then by donkey, her story still travels to the farthest corners of the earth. And though she suffered as much as any woman in the world's history, her suffering changed to joy at her son's resurrection.

Today, as in the time of Jesus' birth, Mary is the embodiment of one of the greatest and still unexplained miracles of the Bible, the Virgin Birth. Because of this, she is unique in the history of women, as is her son, who brought salvation to mankind.

She is great, not only in being the most perfect woman recorded in history but because of her part in the miracle of the Virgin Birth. This has been no better explained in almost 2,000 years than has the origin of the sun, the moon, and the stars.

We can imagine that as a young girl in Nazareth, Mary was more serious and pious than other girls of her age and more given to believing in the wonders of God. Yet she was too humble to think that she would be the center of mankind's greatest miracle, the birth of the Christ Child. Even in her early years we can see that she had completely surrendered her whole being to the higher, holier will.

The story of the Virgin Birth appears in the Bible in two separate places, thus strengthening the account. The First Gospel (Matt. x 18-21) tells the story from the point of view of Joseph. The angel appearing before Joseph tells him, "Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins."

The Third Gospel (Luke 1:27-35) tells the story from the point of view of Mary. It seems quite likely that Luke acquired this information from his association with Mary herself, or from one who knew Mary well, for the narrative in the first portion could only have come from Mary herself. One commentator has been so bold as to speculate that Mary might have written some parts of the first two chapters of Luke, because it is so completely from her viewpoint.'

In Luke the angel appears to Mary saying, "Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus."

Mary's first recorded words, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" (Luke 1:34), are in themselves remarkable, because they bespeak her purity and her humility.

The angel then told her that "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35). She accepted this annunciation with faith and resignation. When she answered, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38), she showed that her thoughts and longings were ever directed to God alone. She was willing to obey and surrender herself to divine love, and her reverence for the body as the inviolate temple of God became all the more secure.

The accounts of the conception of Jesus in Matthew and Luke are so similar that one confirms the other. These Gospel writers only use different words. Matthew says that Mary's son will be conceived through the "Holy Ghost," while Luke says He will be conceived through the "Holy Spirit, the power of the Most High."

Even Jesus later confirmed His supernatural birth when He declared, "Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world" (John 8:23).

Scholars interpret the story of the Virgin Birth differently. Some see all birth as a miracle, and warn that by overestimating the sanctity of virginity one may depreciate the sanctity of marriage. Others see the Virgin Birth as of less importance than the supreme miracle, which was the actual appearance in the world of One who in His mind and spirit completely expressed and embodied the reality of God.

The story of Mary and the birth of the Christ Child is the most holy story in Scripture. In a setting of majestic poetry and imagery and in the presence of angels, the most divine idea ever conceived has its inception with the angel's first words, "Hail, thou that art highly favoured, the Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women" (Luke 1:28). This "Hail Mary" inspired the words of the famous Ave Maria or angelical salutation. The first words of the song are taken right out of this.

With even the most liberal scholars the miracle of Christ's birth is but the framework. The appearance of Christ himself is the picture. All of the liberal scholars, no matter what their interpretation of the Virgin Birth, approach this story with the deepest reverence. They regard Mary's part as having divine significance.

Probably in her early twenties or younger at the time of the conception, Mary went quietly and prudently to her older and more experienced cousin Elisabeth to tell of the angel's visit. In these times such a journey, requiring three days, presented many problems, but Mary surmounted all of them, thinking not of the difficulties but only of the urgency of her visit.

Before this, Mary had already been introduced as a "virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David" (Luke 1:27). The betrothal in these times usually preceded the wedding by about a year. Mary's majestic quality of faith shines through this period. As she hastened to Elisabeth, we see that she had surrendered her whole being to the higher, holier will. Elisabeth, a pious older woman, already six months pregnant and her child would be John the Baptist-greeted Mary with the same salutation as that of the angel: "Blessed art thou among women." And she added, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42). Finally she addressed Mary as the "mother of my Lord" (Luke 1:43).

More humble even than before, Mary set forth to magnify the; Lord in those stirring lines (Luke 1:46-55) which have come down to us as the immortal magnificat. It is Mary's hymn of praise to God for His wonderful works. This jubilant song pours from her heart and in its richness and sweep sets forth the wide range of her spiritual experience. In it we can see that Mary knew the age-old Psalms of her people and also the Song of Hannah. Out of them she made a new, sublimer prayer to God. It suggests parts of Psalms 21: and 109, and also has lines from other Psalms. It sings of God's power, of His name and mercy and of how He exalts the humble. There is such spiritual fullness in this Magnificat that mothers of the world always can turn to it for new faith and new belief in the Almighty.

We can visualize the joyous three months that Mary and Elisabeth had together. And yet we wonder, too, if ever a shadow crossed their paths and if they had a premonition of what was to come to their sons. Elisabeth's son, John the Baptist, would be beheaded by Herod to please his stepdaughter and his wife Herodias, and Jesus would be nailed to the cross. But both of these prospective mothers were women of such triumphant faith that they were willing to accept God's plan in their lives and their sons' lives.

After Mary had spent some three months with Elisabeth in Judaea, she returned to Joseph in Nazareth. Though faced with serious problems of her coming marriage and the social implications of her pregnancy, nowhere is there a reference to her unwillingness to place her whole womanhood at the disposal of her Creator.

One great branch of the Christian faith believes that Joseph was many years older than Mary and had been married before, and that his children by this former marriage are the brothers and sisters mentioned in Mark 6:3: "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?" Other commentators conjecture that Mary and Joseph, after the birth of Jesus, had several children, born the normal way. Still others suggest that the "brothers" and "sisters" could have been Jesus' cousins by his mother's sister (John 19:25).

The belief that Joseph was Jesus' legal father only, and that Jesus had no actual brothers and sisters, suggests the perpetual virginity of Mary. In any case, Joseph, humble and industrious laborer that he was, played a vital role as the protector of Mary, the legal guardian and one who provided for the child Jesus. We can picture Joseph, kindly and good, at work in his shop in Nazareth, planing cedars

from Lebanon, sawing hard woods from the hills, and making ox yokes and well buckets. And he passed on his skill to his son. Joseph's love for Mary makes us certain of the devotion she attracted to herself. Never did she need him more than in those days when a decree had gone out from Caesar Augustus that a census of the Roman world must be taken. And Joseph went up from Nazareth to Bethlehem, "to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child" (Luke 2:5). Mary, too, it is thought, was of the house of David, and according to ancient tradition her parents were two holy persons, Joachim and Anna. Some Christian faiths, in the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, hold that Mary, from the moment of her conception, was preserved from all stain of original sin.

For Mary this journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, some ninety miles by donkey up and down hill, was to be long and arduous. We can imagine that she baked the bread that would be required, dried the meat, filled a sack with lentils, and poured water from the well into a goatskin. She also packed the swaddling clothes that she would need before the return.

Let us imagine further that Joseph saddled their old and patient donkey and packed upon its back goat's-hair blankets for them to lie down upon and to use as a cover also, for the December nights' in the Judaeen hills often were cold and rainy. Several nights no doubt they slept under a large tree, if they could not find a but for shelter.

Each morning as they set forth, Joseph would help Mary gently upon the donkey and then walk at her side, watching carefully so that the donkey would not make a misstep. The sun warmed them in the day and the stars shone over them at night as they descended the Jordan and followed the eastern bank of the river as far as the city of Jericho. This was a warmer though a longer route than that leading across the plain of Esdraelon; and it was a less arduous route for Mary, though difficult at best.

When Mary and Joseph reached Bethlehem there was no place at the inn, for the town was teeming with people who had come to be enrolled. The innkeepers, like some of us today, did not know when the great possibilities of God had come right to their doors. So it was that many turned Mary and Joseph away; and finally when Mary could wait no longer because her child was about to be born, she and Joseph found rest inside a stable of the inn. There Mary delivered her son and wrapped Him in the swaddling clothes that she had brought from Nazareth, and laid Him in the straw of the oxen's crib.

Every woman who has brought forth a child can imagine that Mary, as her child was born, was uplifted by her sustaining faith in God, and that her exultation was great as she beheld Him for the first time. Beautiful mother that she was, she had brought forth a child beautiful of form, and with an indescribable radiance in His face.

When the shepherds, who had seen the "glory of the Lord" and had heard the angels' words as they tended their flocks, came and told Mary of the angel's message, she accepted quietly the positive affirmation of the heavenly message: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). She might have gone forth among the people and exclaimed, "Look, I am the mother of the Saviour." Others wondered at what the angel had said to the shepherds, "But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Wonderful mother -she was to hold in her heart all the intimations of a divine significance for her child which had come to her in angelic words!

Mary's divine mission of being the mother of the only begotten Son of God never faltered from the manger to the cross on Calvary. She displayed great wisdom, as well as spiritual discernment, in the circumcision of her son, in His presentation at the Temple, and in her own appearance at the Temple for her purification forty days after His birth. These were all according to the old Mosaic law. Luke, one of the greatest poets of the New Testament, tells that Mary and Joseph took the babe into the Temple and placed Him in the arms of Simeon, a righteous and devout man, who saw that this child had the light of God on His face. Again Mary must have marveled at what Simeon said to her about her child: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). And she must have questioned his prophetic words, though she expressed no fear when he said, "(Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

Mary's destiny was further manifested when the aged Anna, standing in the Temple with Simeon, "spake of Him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

Quietly Mary left the Temple and became a mother who gave her best to her child so that it could be said of Him that He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

The evil of man's might crossed Mary's path very soon, however. Matthew tells that, after the visit of the Wise Men bearing princely gifts, Joseph was warned in a dream to take Jesus and Mary and flee to Egypt. From Bethlehem, which lies about 2,000 feet above sea level, the way descended to the lowlands. There was no road, only a steep path which for centuries had been trodden by man and beast. Their first morning, as the sun burst forth, they looked down upon the land of the Philistines, and on the second day they may have reached Gaza, the last of the larger towns. And then the measureless desert stretched out before them, the yellow sand dunes glowing against the low horizon and softly fading one into the other. As they journeyed, Mary gently watched over Him whom God had promised of old to her fathers. And as she reached the banks of the Nile, her own people's history came alive to her.

Mary and Joseph remained in Egypt until the death of Herod and then they traveled eastward back over the desert. On and on they plodded, finally reaching Galilee and their own beloved town of Nazareth.

Mary watched over her son as He grew, with loving care, feeding Him, clothing Him, and leading Him gently by the hand. Guided by her, He gained in knowledge of the spirit until He came to love God's house above all others. With His mother and father He made annual trips from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover.

When He was twelve years old, it is recorded that after they had left the Temple and had started on the homeward journey, they missed Him. First thinking that He was journeying with another group of pilgrims on the dusty road behind, they were not concerned that their son was not at their side. The road was thronged with people, some on foot, some on donkeys, and some on fine riding camels. But at nightfall Mary and Joseph became anxious and turned back to find Him. After a three-day search they discovered Him in the Temple, sitting among the doctors of law.

Turning to her son, Mary said to him, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing" (Luke 2:48).

Jesus indicated His divine Sonship when He answered, "How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Again we hear, like a refrain in a song, "his mother kept all these sayings in her heart" (Luke 2:51). Strange new emotions, however,

must have entered her being. The gulf of His divine parentage that had begun to separate her from her son now made her know that He felt God to be in a special sense His father.

Joseph disappears from the narrative after this incident, and Mary is depicted alone. It is probable that Joseph died about this time, though no record of this fact is given.

Mary reappears in the story in John 2 at the Marriage at Cana in Galilee. This was her son's farewell to His private life and the beginning of His public ministry. Probably Mary was approaching her fiftieth year. Her cousin Elisabeth's son, John the Baptist, who had already gathered about him a group of disciples, had predicted that Jesus was the Messiah.

When Mary saw that the wine was giving out at the feast, she said to her son, "They have no wine" (John 2:3). For the first time He answered her not as her son but as the Messiah, calling her "Woman" and saying, "What have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come" (John 2:4). Though He expressed His complete subordination to the will of God, this must have been a trying test of Mary's faith, but she kept submissive, patient, trustful. She would remain so, even when her son was crucified and laid in the tomb. Thinking not of herself but of Him, she now experienced a new sense of exultation when she saw that wine filled the empty jars. What a great thing for a mother to witness, the first of her son's miracles!

From now on Mary remained in the background. We get our next brief glimpse of her when she and His brethren visit Him as the multitude sat about Him (Mark 3:31-35; Matt. 12:46-50; Luke 19:19-21). Again He dismissed His personal relationship to His mother, saying, "Who is my mother, or my brethren?" further explaining, "For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and my sister, and my mother" (Mark 3:35). She no doubt was beginning to know that for those who live the life of the spirit the human family bond is transcended by a wider love. Her love, too, was enlarged, and consequently, she could bear more bravely what was to come, the crucifixion of her son.

In this she would have much to bear, but her knowledge of God and His promise would sustain her. And because she bore nobly such loneliness and such heartache at the foot of the cross, countless people down the centuries, in moments of anguish and pain, have found comfort. Mary's silent endurance of what she could not change is her great lesson at the cross to the world.

As she saw her son accept death as the price of salvation, she knew that she still had to assist in the furtherance of His mission by her service to His grief-stricken disciples.

The last human tie with her son was breaking, but she had the fortitude and faith to remain with Him to the end. As He was lifted high on the cross, He showed His tender solicitude for her in his last words. He saw His mother and the disciple He loved standing together and He said, "Woman, behold thy son!" and to the disciple, "Behold thy mother!" It came about as Jesus planned that "from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:26, 27). In this hour of greatest agony, Jesus forgot not to entrust His beloved mother to the care of John, the Beloved Disciple.

Mary appears again after the Resurrection. No record is given of what she felt at this triumphant time when it was found that her son had arisen. The witness to the Resurrection came through Mary Magdalene, who had gone to the tomb with other women.

Mary the mother was to experience new confidence in her own mission after she learned that her son had arisen from the dead. She now was not so conscious of her own motherhood as she was of the divine Sonship of Jesus.

The last mention of Mary is when she was gathered with the infant Church after the Ascension. She was praying with the apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). We can know that great now was her faith in the Eternal. In her service to the early Church, Mary typifies "the noblest qualities in womanhood."

It is no wonder that the adoration of the Madonna has prevailed throughout the Christian and civilized world for nearly 2,000 years, and that human genius, inspired by faith, has been dedicated to the portrayal of Mary as the mother of Christ.

There is no record of the time or manner of her death. This is unimportant, for in reality she lives on as the world's most beautiful example of motherhood. The world seems to know today why she was hailed, "Blessed art thou among women."

ELISABETH

Mother of John the Baptist and wife of Zacharias, also a cousin of Mary, mother of Jesus. First to greet Mary as mother of the Messiah, when Mary comes to spend three months with her before Jesus is born.

LUKE 1:5, 7, 13, 24, 36, 40, 41 57

MOTHER OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

ELISABETH holds two distinctions that lend immortality to her name. She was the mother of John the Baptist, forerunner of the Messiah, and she was first to greet her cousin Mary as mother of the Messiah. Elisabeth also occasioned two of the greatest poems in the New Testament, Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) and Zacharias' Benedictus (Luke 1:68-79), both of which are parts of the ritual in the Christian Church today.

Like her husband Zacharias, Elisabeth was a godly person. She was not only the wife of a priest but the daughter of a family of priests of the house of Aaron. She also bore the name of Aaron's wife Elisheba (Exod. 6:23), the Hebrew for Elisabeth.

The town where Elisabeth lived was in the hill country of Judaea, in a desert tract west of the Dead Sea, possibly near Ain Karem, four miles north of Jerusalem. Her house, let us suppose, was within walking distance of Jerusalem's great Temple, where her husband officiated at stated times. As the wife of a priest, Elisabeth gave loving attention to her husband's priestly vestments and to her home, where godly people came to talk over Temple matters. We have Biblical record that both Elisabeth and her husband were "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6).

Elisabeth is introduced by Luke as a woman well stricken in years and barren, just as had been Isaac's mother Sarah. To Elisabeth it was foretold that her son would "be great in the sight of the Lord, . . . and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15).

This message from Gabriel had come first to Zacharias when he went into the Holy Place of the Temple of the Lord to burn incense and to pray. A multitude was praying in the court outside. Probably Elisabeth was with them, or she could have been praying in the quiet of her home. It is easy to imagine the joy and wonder that filled her heart when she learned of the good tidings that had come to her husband. We can be sure that she received the message in a spirit of humility and reverent responsibility.

Elisabeth, who believed strongly in miracles, must have walked more prayerfully now about her house, though her husband was so overwhelmed that he had lost his ability to speak. The angel Gabriel had told Elisabeth's husband that he would not speak again until these things, which had been foretold, had come to pass, because he had not the faith to believe in such a miracle.

Though Elisabeth was old in years, let us imagine she was still vigorous and walked with a vibrant step. She was a woman, too, who thanked God for the wonders in the lives of His people. Even the stars that shone above her little home represented God's goodness to men. If He could make the stars shine, He could bring forth to her a son, who would glorify Him. How could she doubt? The human body itself was a miracle so wondrous that only God could create it and bring into being both human life and infinite mind. A child was the fruit of the womb and only God could bestow it as His gift to man and woman.

In the sixth month that Elisabeth was with child, her cousin Mary, the Virgin, now in Nazareth, received word that she would bear a son and that His name would be called Jesus. Mary had greater faith when the angel explained to her, "And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren" (Luke 1:36). The women now had a common bond. They knew that with God nothing was impossible.

With new rejoicing in her heart, Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country where Elisabeth lived. When she arrived at Elisabeth's home, the latter received her visitor with the stirring words, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (Luke 1:42). Then Elisabeth asked in a modest spirit and with a new sense of wonder, "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). On Mary's arrival she had received a special inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This had enabled her to recognize in her kinswoman a fulfillment of the promise of God Himself, to know Mary as the mother of the coming Messiah. Elisabeth unconsciously illustrated the meaning of her own name, which in its Hebrew form signifies "God is an oath." To her, God's word was all powerful.

For three months Elisabeth entertained in her house the mother of the child who one day would be acclaimed the Christ. Though with child herself, and filled with great dreams for him, Elisabeth, humble, unselfish woman that she was, could accede that Mary would bear a child greater than her own.

During these three months that Mary visited Elisabeth, we can imagine that they unburdened their hearts to each other and that! Elisabeth had many words of wisdom for Mary, who was young, enough to be Elisabeth's daughter. Yet in their common experience of approaching motherhood the age difference became insignificant as they joyfully planned for the birth of their sons, who were to be so near the same age. ;

Happy were they then in that they could not look across the years to the end of their sons' lives. Mary's son would be crucified on the cross by an angry mob. Elisabeth's son, John the Baptist, would be beheaded by Herod, ruler of Galilee. As Elisabeth and Mary visited together, we wonder if they had any premonition of what was to come. Certainly they found much joy in each other, because they loved and understood each other and had the same strong belief in God.

They have been depicted together in Christian art all over the world, from the early Christian paintings on the walls of the catacombs in Rome to such splendid examples of the Renaissance as Raphael's "Visitation" in the Gallery in Madrid, Spain.

Shortly after Mary's return to her home, Elisabeth gave birth to her son. We know she watched over him with a feeling of tenderness, veneration, and awe. On the eighth day, as is still the custom in Jewish families, a great gathering of neighbors and kinsmen came for the circumcizing and naming of Elisabeth's child. Some of those present called him Zacharias, after his father, but Elisabeth, remembering what the angel had said, declared positively, "Not so; but he shall be called John" (Luke 1:60).

Though still without his speech, Zacharias showed how he relied on his wife in the naming of his child when he wrote, "His name is John" (Luke 1:63). After that affirmation Zacharias' mouth opened and his tongue was loosed. Another miracle had come to pass in the home of Elisabeth. Her husband was healed of his speechlessness and spoke his famous Benedictus glorifying God as the divine deliverer.

What a joyful moment for Elisabeth. Her husband could speak again and at her side was a promising son. The hand of the Lord was with her. Like his father, John the Baptist became just and holy and ministered unto the people.

Elisabeth's story ends as her son's story begins to unfold. We can only hope that she lived to rejoice in his early ministry, while his good tidings were reaching forth and turning many to repentance.

The tribute of John the Baptist to Jesus as one mightier than himself and his beautiful spirit of renunciation when he said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30) are a reminder of the spirit of his noble mother.

Elisabeth's most lasting memorial as the great mother of John the Baptist is found in the words of Christ when he said, "Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist" (Matt. 11:11).

ANNA

An aged widow, she lives in the Temple at Jerusalem. Serves God with fastings and prayers night and day. Speaks first words of messianic hope to those looking for redemption in Jerusalem.

LUKE 2:36-38

FIRST TO ACCLAIM THE CHRIST

HUMBLE, staid, serious, unearthly in spirit, a woman of a strangely expectant faith—that was Anna the prophetess, the first person to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. In the little band of men and women who looked for the Redeemer, she was the one figure that stood out in bold strokes.

This was a period when Rome dominated the entire Mediterranean world, ruling an empire larger than the Greeks, the Persians, or the Egyptians had known. The Empire was strong and powerful. Its science, philosophy, theology, wealth, ecclesiastical and social power reigned supreme and were in opposition to any such idea as the coming of a Messiah. But there were a few, like Anna, who knew that the prophecies long foretold would be fulfilled.

Why was the first one in Judaea to proclaim the Christ this gentle, elderly woman? Luke depicts Anna as dwelling in an ivory tower of the spirit, aloof from worldly preoccupations. She lived on a plane apart from material things and "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." He calls her a prophetess and in that she joins other eminent figures—Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. Anna stands foremost among prophetesses in the New Testament.

In Luke's brief description of Anna we learn that she was a woman of great age, who "had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years." From that passage commentators determine her age differently. Some say that she was eighty-four years old. Others interpret the text to mean that she had been a widow eighty-four years. If she had been married seven years, she was now probably well over a hundred years old. But her exact age is of no great consequence.

More important is Anna's spirituality. The mention of her is so brief that little of her character can be given. But there is enough to liken her to a bright star that sweeps above the horizon and then suddenly dips down out of sight.

Denied the triumphs of motherhood, she had scarcely absented herself from the Temple since her early widowhood. Probably she held the place in the Temple of a deaconess or Sister of Charity.

It is easy to visualize Anna as a woman erect for her years, walking about the pillared Temple of Jerusalem in a flowing black dress with a shoulder shawl of a brighter hue, probably purple, and paler drapery about her white hair.

Onlookers, however, would not observe too closely Anna's attire, but her face, a face that showed neither hate nor cynicism nor malice, but a gentle sweetness and a serene spirituality. She seemed to say, "I am one of those who never ceases to believe in the great wonders of God." Her faith was the kind that gives meaning to the words of Joel quoted later by Peter in his great speech at Pentecost: "I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath" (Acts 2:19).

Anna belonged to the godly remnant. Perhaps she, like the Wise Men, had searched the skies the night Christ was born and had seen the "star in the east." She was one of those who had time to enjoy all of God's beauties, such as the stars that lighted the sky at night, the dawn that broke in all its effulgent color over the Temple, and the setting sun as it dipped behind the tall spires shadowing the Temple's rugged stone walls.

Though an old woman of the ancient tribe of Asher, a daughter of Phanael, Anna was young in hope. She not only confessed the Christ but spoke of Him to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel. Is not this the real clue to Anna's creative, active, significant self?

Among these others looking for redemption and the coming of the messianic age were people of a simple faith, people who like Anna were more engrossed in spiritual things around the Temple than in material things, people who read the Scrolls of the Law and the Prophets daily and believed fully what Isaiah had spoken when he said, "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness" (Isa. 32:1). "And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Isa. 11:1). She believed, too, in what the prophet Micah had said, "But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel" (Mic. 5:2). She believed, too, in what Isaiah had said in Isaiah 2:2-4, and what Micah had said in almost the same words in Micah 4:1-4.

We know that Anna was a woman who listened to the reading of the scrolls of the sacred scriptures (the Bible of her time) and believed fully in the prophecies they contained. Not only did she believe, but she watched unceasingly for the coming of the Messiah.

The time for her to see Him with her own eyes finally came. It was at His presentation in the Temple as an infant according to the customs of the chosen people, and at the ceremonial service of His mothers purification, forty days after His birth. The favored mother, Mary, with Joseph, had now come up to the holy city on Mount Zion from Bethlehem, to present the most mysterious offering that had ever been laid before that altar.

Probably Anna watched Mary cross the large open space within the Temple walls, called the Court of the Gentiles, and ascend the beautiful steps of the uncovered gateway leading into the Court of the Women, a higher area which lay like a terrace above the outer court.

Just as the venerable Simeon uttered his famous *Nunc Dimittis*, saying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation" (Luke 2:29-30), Anna stood watching the wondering priest. No sooner had she seen the enraptured Simeon lift the child Jesus in his arms than she caught the heavenly inspiration that animated the priest and the baby's parents.

Turning to the bystanders who had waited so long for the redemption of the Lord, Anna declared that this was the promised Messiah, the Hope of Israel, the Redeemer of the world. What greater prophecy could there be than this concerning an unconscious, helpless babe?

This aged woman had seen God more than events, and God in events. She had seen because she was intimate with grace, providence, and redemption.

As Joseph and Mary quietly wended their way out of the Temple with the child Jesus, we can see Anna unobtrusively returning to her thanksgiving and prayer in the Temple. In all probability she did not live to witness the public manifestation of the Christ, much less to hear His divine teachings and promises. But she had been there to behold Him and to thank God for Him and to speak of Him to all those men and women of prayer and devotion who had looked for the redemption He was to bring.

MARTHA AND MARY

Sisters of Bethany open their home to Jesus. Martha bustles about; Mary is more pensive. To Martha Jesus announces the victory over death. Mary anoints his feet with oil. Both are at last feast in Bethany.

LUKE 10:38, 40, 41

JOHN 11:1, 5, 19, 20, 21, 24, 30, 39; 12:2

LUKE 10:39, 42

JOHN 11:1, 2, 19, 20, 28, 31, 32, 45; 12:3

MARK 14:3-9

"THE MASTER IS COME"

BOTH Martha and Mary belong in the gallery of famous Bible women. It was to Martha that Jesus first declared, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:25-26). Countless millions down the centuries have been comforted by these words first received by Martha. To her sister Mary goes the distinction of having anointed Jesus before He trudged to the cross. Through this loving attention to the Christ, Mary showed every evidence of knowing more of His secret power and wisdom than His disciples did. Because of this, she rises up as one of the most spiritually sensitive women in the New Testament.

Bethany, where these two sisters lived, was a quiet little village on the southeast of the Mount of Olives, beside the Jericho Road. It was a short and pleasant walk from here over the Mount of Olives to the Temple at Jerusalem.

We can picture the house where Martha and Mary lived as one of the most comfortable in Bethany, for we have every evidence that they were women of means, and gave of their means as well as themselves. Mary, for example, used her own costly ointment on Jesus.

Their house was probably a two-story place with a broad outer stairway leading to an upper room. The staircase, let us suppose, led up from a well-shaded court; and it was here that Jesus often paused to refresh Himself. Both house and garden were inviting, for Martha excelled as a homemaker.

She and Mary were as unlike in disposition as Esau and Jacob had been. While Martha was practical and unemotional, Mary was impassioned and imaginative. Martha probably was the older and mothered Mary; and she took the lead as homemaker. Probably Martha was a widow and Mary had never married. Despite their differences, Martha and Mary exhibited a close bond of sympathy for each other.

Like most attentive, eager-hearted, and affectionate hostesses, Martha strove for perfection around her house, especially when a guest the family loved as much as they did Jesus came for a visit. Mary was the more pensive and the quieter of the two. As Martha bustled about her home duties, she did not have Mary's calmness or her holy trustfulness.

Craving a fellowship of the spirit attuned to His, Jesus stopped one day at the home of the Bethany sisters on His way to the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. Martha seemed busier than usual, while Mary sat in deep humility at Jesus' feet, drinking in His every word. Martha, like most busy homemakers, became concerned that Mary sat idly by while there was work to be done. We can be sure that Mary was not selfish in her withdrawal from homemaking, but she knew that Martha had the ability to carry on without her. And probably it was Martha's house, not Mary's, in which they lived.

Instead of gently entreating Mary to help her during a rush period, Martha turned and said, "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me" (Luke 10:40). And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:41-42).

In these few words we have a careful delineation of the character of the two sisters. Probably Martha had prepared too lavish a meal, when a simple one would have sufficed. And Jesus was more interested in food for the soul than in food for the body. Yet Martha was tender in her service to her Lord.

The second scene in the New Testament in which Martha and Mary figure prominently is narrated in John 11:1-46. This is their most triumphant scene, for it deals with the raising of their brother Lazarus from the tomb. And it was here that Jesus declared to Martha, "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:26). Martha, a woman of great discernment, responded with one of the most magnificent confessions of faith in the New Testament. "Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world" (John 11:27).

Lazarus had been in his tomb four days when Martha learned that Jesus was approaching on the road to Bethany. She went outside the village to meet Him, while Mary remained behind sitting in the house. But both she and Martha finally spoke to Him exactly the same words, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died" (John 11:21, 32). Of the weeping Mary Jesus asked, "Where have ye laid him?" And they said unto Him, "Lord, come and see" (John 11:34).

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35), and the two sisters became the first named women recorded in the New Testament to witness Jesus' expression of grief for a friend. They knew their brother had been Jesus' well-loved friend. They also realized that Jesus was grieved not only at their brother's death but also at the indignation and unbelief of some of the people who stood there. Their loving attitude toward Jesus in a moment of trial drew a striking contrast to the hate and jealousy of some of the others standing by.

The sympathy of the two sisters must have been comforting to Jesus. Though their temperaments were poles apart, now they were one in spirit, and Jesus understood and loved both of them. As they stood there looking at the recessed tomb of their brother Lazarus, a tomb carved horizontally in the rock with a slab to close the entrance, they remembered the promise that they would "see the glory of God" (John 11:40). And they did.

Lazarus walked from the tomb, heavily bound in his grave clothes, and Martha and Mary heard the Master say, "Loose him, and let him go" (John 11:44). They were witnessing the forerunner of a similar miracle, when Jesus Himself would rise from the tomb.

In the scene where Lazarus came forth from the tomb, Martha and Mary stood by more loyal than ever, while the jealous-hearted already were plotting against Jesus. The loyalty of the two sisters meant much to this lonely man and to other believers in Bethany, who looked to Martha and Mary for leadership because of their close friendship with Jesus.

The third and final scene in which Martha and Mary figured prominently was at the last feast in Bethany, six days before the Passover. Both Matthew and Mark intimate that this feast was in the home of the deceased Simon the leper. John makes no mention of this. Because Martha was a notable housewife, the banquet most probably was entrusted to her. In this last feast at Bethany, Martha and Mary were the central figures with Jesus and Lazarus. Many had come out of curiosity to see Lazarus, but Martha and Mary were there to express gratitude because Jesus had raised their brother from the tomb.

Mary, impelled to express her adoration, took a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly (John 12:3), and came softly behind Jesus and poured the precious perfume on His feet, wiping them with her hair. The same service is mentioned in John 11:2. We learn in Mark 14:5 that the ointment might have sold for more than 300 pence, or about sixty dollars at that time, but with a purchasing power now about four times what it was in the first century.

Mary was following the custom of this time, that of refreshing guests at banquets by pouring cool and fragrant ointments on their heads and sometimes their feet. She knew how Jesus' enemies despised Him and were drawing Him into their net. Yet she did not try to dissuade Him from going up to Jerusalem. He who had brought back her brother Lazarus from the grave would not willfully try to grasp at mortal life Himself.

Mary, who knew that some things were worth dying for, in this act of pouring ointment on Jesus was endeavoring to show Him that in her eyes whatever course He chose would be right and good.

Poised, pure, we see her standing meekly and reverently by after she had poured the costly ointment on Jesus feet. We also see Martha, understanding sister that she was, with a look of love in her eyes as she saw her sister administer the ointment.

Then these two sisters heard Jesus say what has been called the loneliest sentence in literature, "Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this" (John 12:7). The implication here is that some of the ointment was left to be used in the preparation of the body of Jesus for burial.

Though others, including Judas, criticized because Mary had been so extravagant and had not given this wealth to the poor, Jesus praised her for her gift to Him who, unlike the poor, would not always be with them. In His appreciation of her gift, Jesus invited others to enjoy God's many blessings, not only the lovely things of the earth and the sky and sea but also such a creation as fragrant ointment.

Mary herself had not inscribed her memorial on a gravestone. She had poured out her precious ointment in wholehearted devotion to the living Jesus and her broken alabaster vase would fill the world with its fragrance down the ages.

Paradoxical as it may seem, in a little while Judas would accept thirty pieces of silver, the equivalent of about twenty dollars and a sum one-third less than the cost of the perfume. In accepting twenty dollars from the chief priests, Judas set in motion the Crucifixion. Yet Mary, who was called extravagant in the giving of a gift that cost sixty dollars, showed she understood the wiser use of money. She was willing to expend a large sum to provide beauty and comfort for a loved one.

We can be certain that Martha, too, sanctioned her sister's lavish gift to their Master, who so soon would trudge to the cross alone.

THREE SICK WOMEN

Three diseased women come to Jesus. All three go their way whole again, for he heals them.

WOMAN WITH FEVER MATT. 8:14,15; MARK 1:30, 31; LUKE 4:38, 39

WOMAN WITH ISSUE OF BLOOD MATT. 9:20-22; MARK 5:25-34; LUKE 8:43-48

WOMAN CROOKED FOR 18 YEARS LUKE 13:11-13

AND JESUS HEALED ALL OF THEM

ONE had a high fever from which she could not arise. One had had a hemorrhage for twelve years. Another had been bent in body for eighteen years. And Jesus healed all three of them.

The woman who had lain ill with a high fever was the mother-in-law of Simon, to whom Jesus later gave the name of Peter. We can imagine that she assisted much in the ministry of her disciple son-in-law, but now she had what Luke, the physician, calls a "great fever," and was so sick that she could not arise. Probably it was malaria, very common then in this region.

We can imagine that she was a woman with gray hair and a worn countenance, and that her son-in-law had a genuine affection for her. Jesus had just come to the home of Simon Peter, probably at Capernaum or Bethsaida. Only a short time before, according to Matthew, He had healed a leper and a centurion's servant who had palsy. Now it was probably early afternoon, when the fever had risen to its highest point, and the woman's family sat anxiously watching her.

Jesus came to her bedside and merely touched her hand, and the fever left her.

The remarkable thing about Simon's wife's mother is that after she was healed "she ministered unto them." All three Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, report this fact. Because she owed her health and life to Christ, she could express her gratitude only in service in His ministry.

Then there was the woman who is the prototype of those who see their powers wasting away in an incurable disease. This woman had had an issue of blood for twelve long years. She was weak and weary and disheartened, for she "had suffered many things of many physicians and had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse" (Mark 5:26). Even Luke, the physician, admitted she could not be healed by a physician (Luke 8:43).

This woman, according to the law of the time, was regarded as unclean and was restricted in her contact with others. Dared she expect even a light touch from Jesus? But she believed that if she could touch merely His garment she would be made whole again.

So it was she gently touched the broad edging of His long tunic. It was like the turning on of a great light in a dark room. She felt His healing energy go through her body immediately, and He too sensed that power had gone from Him, for He turned and said, "Who touched me?" (Mark 5:31).

The woman, fearful of what He might say and trembling with joy at what had happened to her, came and poured out to Him the story of her long suffering. All this occurred on a crowded street, probably in Capernaum, when Jesus was on His way to the bedside of Jairus' daughter.

Matthew and Luke report that Jesus said to this woman, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole" (Luke 8:48). Mark gives a more stirring portrayal when he reports the phrase, "Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague" (Mark 5:34). What triumphant words for a woman who had suffered for twelve years!

Many, like this woman, have gone to physicians and have not been cured, but she had been healed instantaneously by the greatest physician of them all. And she went forth in peace again.

Later legend gives this woman the name of Berenice of Veronica. Eusebius of Caesarea (A.D. 264-340) in his *Ecclesiastical History*, tells of a bronze statue that was erected to her at Caesarea Philippi. But inanimate things like statues could never tell her story. Only Jesus' triumphant words, "Thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48), ring forth the certainty and the wonder of her healing.

Finally there was the woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years. Her body was crooked. Probably she had suffered from a serious accident or from some crippling disease like arthritis.

Imagine what it would be like not to walk straight for eighteen years. Think of how broken one would be in spirit. This woman probably had lost all hope, because her body had been bent for so long.

Then, on the Sabbath, she came before Jesus in her crippled condition. So serious was her ailment that she could not raise herself up and look into His face.

Turning to her and laying His hands upon her, He said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity" (Luke 13:12). What a positive declaration! The woman could once more walk forth well and whole again.

The most amazing thing about this woman, Luke tells us, is that she glorified God. She did not take her healing for granted, but offered a prayer of adoration to the Giver of all good.

The healing of this woman and the other two, one with fever, the other with an issue of blood for twelve years, makes more insistent the question, "Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

HERODIAS

As the second wife of Herod Antipas, she demands through her daughter the head of John the Baptist, because he had denounced her marriage. She receives this ghastly gift on a platter.

MATT. 14:3, 6

MARK 6:17, 19, 22

SHE OCCASIONED THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

THE most striking example in the New Testament of how far reaching can be the evil influence of a heartless, determined woman in a high position is the story of Herodias. Not only did she occasion the beheading of John the Baptist, but it may even be that she helped to hasten the crucifixion of Christ. It was to her husband, Herod Antipas, that Jesus was sent by Pilate, and Herod might have delayed the verdict. This was the same Herod whom Jesus earlier had compared to a "fox" because of his cunning (Luke 13:32).

Herodias herself, like her husband, was descended from a line of wicked people. Though the story in the Bible relates only one scene in her life, the beheading of John the Baptist, let us view her entire life from the pages of history in order better to understand what kind of woman she was.

Her first marriage had been to her half-uncle Herod Philip. She entered into a second incestuous and illicit union when she divorced him to marry his half-brother Herod Antipas, who was the stepbrother of her father Aristobulus. This Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Peraea during Jesus' time and he is mentioned more frequently in the New Testament than any other Herod.

To Herodias' first union had been born her dancing daughter, to whom Josephus gives the name of Salome, though in the New Testament she is never identified in any way except as Herodias' daughter. The daughter was born of the Herod family on both her father's and mother's side and must have been brought up in the evil atmosphere of the family. We are told she excelled in sensuous dancing.

History shows us that evil ran all through Herodias' life. She was a granddaughter of Herod the Great, who carved out his empire with a sword and sought to destroy the child Jesus (Matt. 2:13). The family line of Herod has become so entangled as to make it a veritable puzzle to historians. They record that he had ten wives and killed his first wife Mariamne, the only human being he ever seems to have loved. Herodias' father, Aristobulus, was the son of Herod the Great by this Mariamne.

After Herodias' first marriage to Herod Philip, history records, she lived in Rome, where her husband had been exiled and disinherited because his mother had taken part in a plot against his father, Herod the Great. There Herodias and her husband, Herod Philip, entertained as their guest her husband's half-brother, Herod Antipas. He had come to Rome to receive his investiture as tetrarch and at this time was married to the daughter of King Aretas of Arabia.

Herod Antipas, while a guest in his half-brother's home, indulged in a guilty relationship with the brother's wife, Herodias. Desiring to be closer to the throne than she could ever be with her present husband, a more retiring man, Herodias was willing to pay any price for a regal position, regardless of principles or people involved.

She persuaded Herod Antipas to divorce his wife, and she in turn divorced her husband and left Rome for Tiberias, the capital city of the province of Galilee, where Herod Antipas was now tetrarch. With her went her daughter, who probably was just entering her teens.

Great artists have depicted Herodias as a beautiful woman, who wore a crown from which a thin veil fell in long, graceful folds. Beneath it was her dark hair, adorned with pearls. Her dress was of a flowing, rich, regal fabric. Richard Strauss has made more real her wickedness in his opera *Salome*, with its setting in Galilee, where her second husband, Herod Antipas, had great power.

The only one who had the courage to speak against this incestuous union of a man of such power was John the Baptist, who said to Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have her" (Matt. 14:4). She was his brother's wife. Herod would have put John to death at once, but he feared the multitude (Matt. 14:5), which looked upon John the Baptist as a prophet. In Mark 6:19 we learn that it was Herodias who felt especially bitter about John and desired his death but was held back by Herod.

Herodias, however, was not a woman who could easily forget John the Baptist's stinging rebuke of her marriage. Vindictive as well as cruel, she determined that she would get rid of this man; and so she entered upon her foul scheme.

Her daughter danced for Herod in the palace on his birthday, as Herodias sat looking on. The daughter pleased Herod so much that he said to her, "Ask of me whatsoever thou wilt, and I will give it thee" (Mark 6:22). The Scriptures tell us further that the daughter went forth and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And the mother made her ghastly request for "the head of John the Baptist."

The daughter became her mother's puppet as she danced to please Herod. Though he "was exceeding sorry" (Mark 6:26), Herodias had her way. She was the evil influence for both her daughter and her husband and the sole instigator of one of the most horrible crimes ever committed against a just and holy man.

According to the portrayal given us in Strauss's opera *Salome*, the daughter danced with many veils and then flung them off one by one, as Herod looked on with lustful eyes. Then when she had concluded her dance, he sent and had John the Baptist beheaded and ordered that the head be brought on a platter and presented to Salome, who in turn gave it to her mother.

Though her husband and daughter committed this horrible crime against John the Baptist, they were merely the tools of Herodias. She was actually more responsible than either of them for the outrage because she had planned it. As Jezebel had made a tool of Ahab to slay the prophets of Jehovah, so Herodias had made a tool of Herod Antipas to behead John the Baptist. Though the Bible follows through to the very end of Jezebel's life, when she was eaten by dogs, the Bible story of Herodias ends with the delivering to her of the head of John the Baptist.

However, ancient history relates that after this she became so jealous of the power of her brother, Agrippa, who had been made a king, that she induced her husband to demand of the Roman emperor Caligula the title of king for himself. But Agrippa sent word to Caligula that Herod had been plotting with the emperor's enemies. When Caligula questioned Herod and Herodias in Rome, he was not satisfied with the answers of the guilty pair.

Instead of making Herod Antipas king, Caligula took from him even the title of tetrarch and added the tetrarchy of Galilee to the kingdom of Agrippa. The emperor banished Herod to Gaul. This is all related by Josephus.

Because of his friendship for her brother, Caligula offered Herodias her freedom, but she chose exile and disgrace with her husband. Strangely enough, this is the only time that we have any historical record of a praiseworthy action on her part.

Legend has it that Herodias and Herod died in Spain. Did she have time to live with her guilty conscience and to realize that the beheading of the holy and just John the Baptist was a crime for which she must suffer to the end of her days? Did she come to see that one word which she might have spoken could have saved Christ? At the time of Jesus' trial Pilate, fearing to render an unpopular verdict, had sent Jesus to Herod, for Jesus was from the town of Nazareth in Herod's tetrarchy of Galilee. But Herod had "mocked" and sent Jesus back to Pilate (Luke 23:11).

Did Herodias ever realize that, had she stood on the side of God and righteousness, the history of this period might have had a different ending? She had been warned by John the Baptist of her evil choice in the matter of her marriage, but she had hardened her heart to this message of God. With but one exception, her life had followed an evil pattern to the end.