

A. L. O. E.

HEBREW HEROES: A
TALE FOUNDED ON
JEWISH HISTORY

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AKA A.L.O.E. A.L.O.E., , Charlotte Maria Tucker Hebrew Heroes: A Tale Founded on Jewish History

Preface

There are few portions of the world's history which, to my own mind, afford subjects of such thrilling interest as that which I have selected for the groundwork of the following story. I have tried, in the main, to adhere closely to facts, though I have ventured somewhat to compress the length of time which actually elapsed between the rising against Syrian tyranny at Modin, and the restoration of the Temple. I may also have been inaccurate in representing Antiochus Epiphanes as being still in Jerusalem at the period when the battle of Emmaus took place. Such trifling deviations from history seem to me, however, by no means to interfere with that fidelity to its grand outlines which an author should conscientiously observe. No historical character has been wilfully misrepresented in these pages. If I have ventured to paint one of the noblest of Judah's heroes with the feelings and weaknesses common to man, I trust that even his most enthusiastic Hebrew admirer will not deem that they lower his dignity as commander, or patriot prince.

The exploits of Judas Maccabeus might seem to be a theme more befitting the pen of one of his own race than mine; yet would I fain hope that a work which it has been a labour of love to a Christian to write, may not be altogether despised even by the descendants of Hebrew heroes who shared the Asmonean's toils and triumphs in the land for which he conquered and died.

A. L. O. E.

CHAPTER I. FAITHFUL TO THE DEATH

The sun was setting gloriously over the hills which encompass Jerusalem, pouring its streams of golden light on the valleys clothed with the vine, pomegranate, and olive, sparkling on the brook Kedron, casting a rich glow on flat-roofed dwellings, parapets, and walls, and throwing into bold relief from the crimson sky the pinnacles of the Temple, which, at the period of which I write, crowned the height of Mount Zion. Not the gorgeous Temple which Solomon had raised, that had long ago been given to the flames, nor yet the Temple as adorned by King Herod: the building before us stands in its simple majesty as erected by the Hebrews after their return from Babylon under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Jeshua. Not the might of the powerful, nor the gold of the wealthy, but the earnest zeal of a people down-trodden and oppressed had built that Temple; and its highest adornment was the promise which Haggai's inspired lips had uttered: *The Desire of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts* (Hag. ii. 7). *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than that of the former* (Hag. ii. 9).

The fulfilment of that promise was still a subject for faith; and seldom had faith had to breast a fiercer storm of persecution than that which was sweeping over God's ancient people at the time when my story opens, about 167 years before the Christian era. The Roman had not yet trodden the soil of Palestine as a conqueror; but a yoke yet more intolerable than his lay on the necks of the sons of Abraham. Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, one of the most merciless tyrants that ever existed, bore rule in the city of David. He had deluged the streets of Jerusalem with blood, he had plundered and polluted the Temple, offered the unclean beast upon God's holy altar, and set up the image of Jupiter Olympus in the place dedicated to the worship of the Lord of Sabaoth. It was a time of rebuke and blasphemy, of fiery persecution against the one pure faith; and if some shrank back from the trial, other Hebrews showed that the spirit of Shadrach and his brethren still lived amongst the people of Judaea.

On the evening which I am describing, a young man was wandering among the clumps of hoary olive-trees which shaded a valley on the eastern side of Jerusalem. The red sunbeams pierced here and there between the grey branching stems and through the foliage, and shone full on the figure of Lycidas the Athenian. No one could have mistaken him for a Hebrew, even had the young man worn the garb of a Jew instead of that of a Grecian. The exquisitely-formed features of the stranger were those which have been made familiar to us by the masterpieces of antiquity treasured in our museums. Lycidas might well have served as model to Phidias for a statue of Endymion. His form was of faultless proportions, remarkable rather for symmetry and grace than for strength; and his face might have been deemed too feminine in its beauty, but for the stamp of intellect on it. That young brow had already worn the leafy crown in the Olympic contest for poetic honours; Lycidas had read his verses aloud in the arena to the critical ears of the Athenians, his fellow-citizens, and thousands from other parts of Greece, and had heard their plaudits ringing through the air at the close. That had been a proud moment for the youthful Athenian, but his ambition had not been satisfied by this his first great success. Lycidas was his own severest critic, and regarded himself as being rather at the starting-point than as at the goal. He had resolved on writing a poem, the fame of which should emulate that of the Iliad, and had chosen as the theme of his verse THE HEROISM OF VIRTUE. Lycidas would draw his pictures from history, choose his models from men, and not from the so-called deities with which superstition or fancy had peopled Olympus. The Athenian had an innate love of the pure and true, which made him intuitively reject fables, and which, amongst his countrymen, exposed him to the charge of scepticism. Lycidas could laugh with Aristophanes at legends of gods and demigods, whom their very priests represented as having more than the common infirmities

and vices of mortal men. Had Lycidas reared an altar, it would have been like that which was seen two centuries later in his native city, with the inscription, To THE UNKNOWN GOD. The Greek knew of no being above earth whom he could intelligently worship; and his religion consisted rather in an intense admiration for virtue in the abstract, than in anything to which his more superstitious countrymen would have given the name of piety.

To collect materials for his poem on THE HEROISM OF VIRTUE, Lycidas had travelled far and wide. He had visited Rome, then a powerful republic, and listened with keen interest to her annals, so rich in stories of patriotism and self-devotion. The Athenian had then turned his course eastward, had visited Alexandria, ascended the Nile, gazed on the Pyramids, even then – more than two thousand years ago – venerable from their antiquity. After seeing the marvels of the land of the Pharaohs, Lycidas had travelled by the way of Gaza to Jerusalem, where he was now residing. He was an occasional guest at the court of the Syrian monarch, to whom he had brought a letter of introduction from Perseus, king of Macedonia.

It was not to indulge in pleasant poetic reveries that Lycidas had on that evening sought the seclusion of the olive-grove, if the direction of the current of his thoughts might be known by the index of his face, which wore an expression of indignation, which at times almost flashed into fierceness, while the silent lips moved, as if uttering words of stern reproof and earnest expostulation. No one was near to watch the countenance of the young Greek, until he suddenly met a person richly attired in the costume worn at the Syrian court, who came upon him in a spot where the narrowness of the path precluded the two men from avoiding each other without turning back, and so brought about a meeting which, to the last comer at least, was unwelcome.

"Ha! my Lord Pollux, is it you!" exclaimed Lycidas, with courteous salutation. "I missed you suddenly from my side to-day at that – shall I call it tragedy? – for never was a more thrilling scene acted before the eyes of man."

"I was taken with a giddiness – a touch of fever," replied the courtier addressed by the name of Pollux. He looked haggard and pale as he spoke.

"I marvel not – I marvel not if your blood boiled to fever-heat, as did mine!" cried Lycidas. "No generous spirit could have beheld unmoved those seven Hebrew brethren, one after another, before the eyes of their mother, tortured to death in the presence of Antiochus, because they refused to break a law which they regarded as divine!"

"Nay," replied Pollux, forcing a smile; "their fate was nothing to me. What cared I if they chose to throw away their lives like fools for an idle superstition!"

"Fools! say rather like heroes!" exclaimed Lycidas, stopping short (for he had turned and joined Pollux in his walk). "I marvel that you have so little sympathy for those gallant youths – you who, from your cast of features, I should have deemed to be one of their race."

Pollux winced, and knitted his dark brows, as if the remark were unwelcome.

"I have looked on the Olympic arena," continued Lycidas, resuming his walk, and quickening his steps as he warmed with his subject; "I have seen the athletes with every muscle strained, their limbs intertwined, wrestling like Milo; or pressing forward in the race for the crown and the palm, as if life were less dear than victory. But never before had I beheld such a struggle as that on which my eyes looked to-day, where the triumph was over the fear of man, the fear of death, where mortals wrestled with agony, and overcame it, silent, or but speaking such brave words as burnt themselves into the memory, deathless utterances from the dying! There were no plaudits to encourage these athletes, at least none that man could hear; there was no shouting as each victor reached the goal. But if the fortitude of suffering virtue be indeed a spectacle on which the gods admiringly look, then be assured that the invisible ones were gazing down to-day on that glorious arena, ay, and preparing the crown and the palm! For I can as soon believe," continued the Athenian, raising his arm and pointing towards the setting sun, "that that orb is lost, extinguished, blotted out from the universe,

because he is sinking from our view, as that the noble spirits which animated those tortured forms could perish with them for ever!"

Pollux turned his head aside; he cared not that his companion should see the gesture of pain with which he gnawed his nether lip.

"It is certain that the sufferers looked forward to existence beyond death," continued the young Athenian. "One of the brothers, as he came forward to suffer, fixed his calm, stern gaze on Antiochus (I doubt not but that gaze will haunt the memory of Syria's king when his own dying hour shall arrive), and said – I well remember his words – 'Wicked prince, you bereave us of earthly life; but the King of heaven and earth, if we die in defence of His laws, will one day raise us up to life eternal.' The next sufferer, stretching forth his hands as if to receive the palm rather than the executioner's stroke, said, with the same calm assurance, 'I received these limbs from Heaven, but I now despise them, since I am to defend the laws of God; from the sure and steadfast hope that He will one day restore them to me.' Is it possible that these men believed that not only souls but bodies would rise again – that some mysterious Power could and would restore them to life eternal? Is this the faith of the Hebrews?" The last question was impatiently repeated by Lycidas before it received an answer.

"Some of them hold such a wild faith," said Pollux.

"A sublime, mysterious faith!" observed Lycidas; "one which makes the souls of those who hold it invulnerable as was the body of Achilles, and without the one weak point. It inspires even women and children with the courage of heroes, as I witnessed this day. The seventh of the Hebrew brethren was of tender years, and goodly. Even the king pitied his youth, and offered him mercy and honours if he would forsake the law of his God. Antiochus swore that he would raise the youth to riches and power, and rank him amongst his favoured courtiers, if he would bend to the will of the king. I watched the countenance of the boy as the offer was made. He saw on the one side the mangled forms of his brethren – the grim faces of the executioners; on the other, all the pomps and glories of earth: and yet he wavered not in his choice!"

Pollux could hardly suppress a groan, and listened with ill-concealed impatience as the Athenian went on with his narrative.

"Then the king bade the mother plead with her son, obey the promptings of nature, and bid him live for her sake. She had stood through all the fearful scene, not like a Niobe in tears, but with hands clasped and eyes upraised, as one who sees the invisible, and drinks in courage from words inaudible to other ears than her own. She heard the king, approached her young son, laid her hand on his shoulder, and gazed on him with unutterable tenderness. Faith with her might conquer fear, but could only deepen love. She conjured her child, by all that she had done and suffered for him, firmly to believe, and to fear not. 'Show yourself worthy of your brethren,' she said, 'that, by the mercy of God, I may receive you, together with your brothers, in the glory which awaits us!' And the fair boy smiled in her face, and followed in the glorious track of those who had suffered before him, praying for his country as he died for his faith. Then, in cruelty which acted the part of mercy, the mother – last of that heroic band – was re-united to them by death. But I could not stay to look upon *that* sacrifice," said Lycidas, with emotion; "I had seen enough, and more than enough!"

"And I have heard enough, and more than enough," muttered Pollux, on whom the description of the scene given by Lycidas had inflicted keen anguish, the anguish of shame and remorse.

"You pity the sufferers?" observed the Athenian.

"Pity – I envy!" was the thought to which the blanched lips of a renegade dared not give utterance; Pollux but shook his head in reply.

"I would fain know more of the religion of the Hebrews," said Lycidas; "I have heard marvellous stories – more sublime than any that our poets have sung – of a Deity bringing this people out of Egypt, making a path for them through the depths of the sea, reining back its foaming waves as a rider his white-maned steed; giving to the thirsty – water from the rock, to the hungry – bread from the skies, and scattering the foes of Israel before them, as chaff is driven by the wind. I have heard

of the sun's fiery chariot arrested in its course by the voice of a man, speaking with authority given to him by an inspiring Deity. Tell me what is the name of the Hebrew's powerful God?"

Pollux pressed his lips closely together; he dared not utter the awful name of Him whom he had denied. The courtier laid his hand on the jewelled clasp which fastened his girdle; perhaps the movement was accidental, perhaps he wished to direct the attention of his companion to the figures of Hercules and the Nemean lion which were embossed on the gold. "You forget," observed Pollux, "that I am a worshipper of the deities of Olympus, that I sacrifice to the mighty Jove."

"I asked not what was your religion," said Lycidas; "my question regarded that held by the Hebrews, of which you can scarcely be ignorant. What is the name of that God whom they would not deny, even to save themselves from torture and death?"

"I cannot tarry here longer, noble stranger," was the hurried reply of Pollux. "The sun has sunk; I must return to the city; Antiochus the king expects my attendance at his banquet to-night."

"I am bidden to it, but I go not," said the young Athenian; "slaughter in the daytime, feasting at night – blood on the hands – wine at the lips – I hate, I loathe this union of massacre and mirth! Go you and enjoy the revel in the palace of your king; were I present, I should see at the banquet the shadowy forms of that glorious matron and her sons; I should hear above the laughter, the shout, and the song, the thrilling tones of voices confessing unshaken confidence in the power and mercy of their God, and the glorious hope of immortality where the oppressor can torture no more."

And with a somewhat constrained interchange of parting courtesies, the free Greek and the sycophant of a tyrant went on their several ways.

CHAPTER II. THE MIDNIGHT BURIAL

The scene which he had witnessed had left the mind of Lycidas in an excited and feverish state. The cooling breeze which whispered amongst the leaves of the olives, and the solitude of the secluded place where Pollux had left him, were refreshing to the young Greek's spirit. He threw himself on the grass beneath one of the trees, leant against its trunk, and gazed upwards at the stars as, one by one, they appeared, like gems studding the deep azure sky.

"Are these brave spirits now reigning in one of these orbs of beauty?" thought the poet; "or are the stars themselves living souls, spirits freed from the chains of matter, shining for ever in the firmament above? I must know more of that Hebrew religion, and seek out those who can initiate me into its mysteries, if it be lawful for a stranger to learn them."

And then the thoughts of Lycidas turned to his poem, and he tried to throw into verse some of the ideas suggested to his mind by the martyrdoms which he had witnessed, but he speedily gave up the attempt in despair.

"Poetic ornament would but mar the grand outlines of such a history," he murmured to himself; "who would carve flowers upon the pyramids, or crown with daisies an obelisk pointing to the skies!"

Gradually sleep stole over the young Greek, his head drooped upon his arm, his eyelids closed, and he slumbered long and deeply.

Lycidas was awakened by sounds near him, low and subdued, the cautious tread of many feet, the smothered whisper, and the faint rustle of garments. The Athenian opened his eyes, and gazed from his place of concealment behind the thick branching stem of the olive on a strange and striking scene.

The moon, full and round, had just risen, but the foliage of the trees as yet obscured most of her light, as her silver lamp hung near the horizon, casting long black shadows over the earth. Several forms were moving about in the faint gleam, apparently engaged in some work which needed concealment, for none of them carried a torch. Lycidas, himself silent as the grave, watched the movements of those before him with a curiosity which for a time so engrossed his mind as to take away all sense of personal danger, though he soon became aware that the intrusion of a stranger on these mysterious midnight proceedings would not only be unwelcome, but might to himself be perilous.

The group of men assembled in that retired spot were evidently Hebrews, and as the eyes of Lycidas became accustomed to the gloom, and the ascending moon had more power to disperse it, he intuitively singled out one from amongst them as the leader and chief of the rest. Not that his tunic and mantle were of richer materials than those of his comrades; plain and dusty with travel were the sandals upon his feet, and he wore the simple white turban which a field-labourer might have worn. But never had turban been folded around a more majestic brow, and the form wrapped in the mantle had the unconscious dignity which marks those born to command. The very tread of his sandalled feet reminded the Athenian of that of the desert lion, and from the dark deep-set eye glanced the calm soul of a hero.

"Here be the place," said the chief, if such he were, pointing to the earth under the branches of the very tree against the trunk of which, on the further side, the temple of Lycidas was pressed, as he bent eagerly forward to watch and to listen.

Not a word was uttered in reply; but the men around, after laying aside their upper garments, set to work to dig what appeared to be a wide trench. The leader himself threw off his mantle, took a spade, and laboured with energy, bringing the whole force of his powerful muscles to bear on his humble toil. All worked in profound silence, nor paused in their labour except now and then to listen, like men to whom danger had taught some caution.

Whilst the men went on with their digging, Lycidas strained his eyes to distinguish the outlines of a group at some paces' distance, which doubtless, though separated from them, belonged to the same party as those so actively employed before him. Two forms appeared to be seated on the ground in a spot evidently chosen for its seclusion; one of them was clothed in dark garments, the other was shrouded in a large white linen veil. Other figures in white seemed to be stretched upon the ground in repose. Lycidas watched this silent group for hours, and all remained motionless as marble, save that ever and anon the dark female figure slightly swayed backwards and forwards with a rocking motion, and that several times the veiled head was turned with a quick movement, as of alarm, when the breeze rustled in the olives a little more loudly than usual, or bore sounds from the city to the woman's sensitive ear.

Meanwhile the work of digging proceeded steadily, and the mound of earth thrown out grew large, for the arms of those who laboured were strong and willing, and no man paused either to rest or to speak save once. It was almost a relief to Lycidas to hear at last the sound of a human voice from one of those phantom-like toilers by night. He who spoke was the fiercest-looking of the band, with something of the wildness of Ishmael's race on features whose high strongly-marked outlines showed the Hebrew cast of countenance in its most exaggerated type.

"There's more thunder in the air," he observed, resting for a minute on his spade, and addressing himself to him whom Lycidas had mentally named "the Hebrew prince," on account of his commanding height and noble demeanour, and the deference with which his order had been received.

No answer was returned to the remark, and the wild-looking Jew spoke again, —

"Have you heard that Apelles starts to-morrow for Modin, charged with a mission from the tyrant to compel its inhabitants to do sacrifice to one of his accursed idol-gods?"

"Is it so? then ere daybreak I set out for Modin," was the reply.

"It may be that the venerable Mattathias would rather have you absent," observed the first speaker.

"Abishai, when the storm bursts, a son's place is by the side of his father," said the princely Hebrew; and as he spoke he threw up a spadeful of earth from the pit which Lycidas doubted not was meant for a grave.

Again the work proceeded in silence. The moon had risen above the trees before that silence was once more broken, this time by the leader of the band, —

"It is deep enough now, and broad enough; go ye and bring the honoured dead."

The command was at once obeyed. All the men present, excepting the chief himself, who remained standing in the grave, went towards the group which has been previously mentioned. Interest chained Lycidas to the spot, though it occurred to his mind that prudence required him to seize this favourable opportunity of quietly making his escape.

The Greek remained, watching in the shadow, as on the rudest of biers, formed by two javelins fastened by cross-bars together, the swathed forms of the dead, one after another, were borne to the edge of the pit. They were followed by the two female mourners that had kept guard over the remains while the grave was being prepared. The first of these was a tall, stately woman, with hair which glistened in the moonbeams like silver, braided back from a face of which age had not destroyed the majestic beauty. Sternly sad stood the Hebrew matron by the grave of the martyred dead; no tear in her eyes, which were bright with something of prophetic fire. So might a Deborah have stood, had Sisera won the victory, and she had had to raise the death-wall over Israel's slain, instead of the song of triumph to hail the conquerors' return.

The other female form, which was smaller, and exquisitely graceful in its movements, remained slightly retired, and still closely veiled. Lycidas remarked that the eyes of the leader watched that veiled form, as it approached, with a softened and somewhat anxious expression. This was, however, but for some moments, and the Hebrew then gave his undivided attention to the pious work on which he was engaged.

Still standing in the grave, the chief received the bodies, one by one, from the men who had borne them to the place of interment. He took each corpse in his powerful arms, and unaided laid it down in its last resting-place, as gently as if he were laying down on a soft couch a sleeper whom he feared to awaken. Lycidas caught a glimpse of the pale placid face of one of the shrouded forms, but needed not that glimpse to feel certain that those whose remains were thus secretly interred by kinsmen or friends at the peril of their lives, were the same as those whose martyrdom he had so indignantly witnessed. The Athenian knew enough of the Syrian tyrant to estimate how daring and how difficult must have been the feat of rescuing so many of the bodies of his victims from the dishonour of being left to the dog or the vulture. The devotion of the living, as well as the martyrdom of the dead, gave an interest to that midnight burial which no earthly pomp could have lent. The spirit of the young Athenian glowed with generous sympathy; and of high descent and proud antecedents as he was, Lycidas would have deemed it an honour to have helped to dig that wide grave for the eight slaughtered Jews.

The burial was conducted in solemn silence, save as regarded the Hebrew matron, and her deep thrilling accents were meeter requiem for the martyrs than the loudest lamentations of hired mourners would have been. As the chief received each lifeless form into his arms, the matron uttered a short sentence over it, in which words of the ancient Hebrew spoken by her fathers blended with the Chaldee, then the language commonly used by the Jews. Her thoughts, as she gave them utterance, clothed themselves in unpremeditated poetry; the Athenian could neither understand all her words, nor her allusions to the past, but the majesty of gesture the music of sound, made him listen as he might have done to the inspired priestess of some oracle's shrine.

"We may not wail aloud for thee, my son, nor rend our garments, nor put on sackcloth, nor pour dust upon our heads. He who hath bereaved thee of life, would bereave thee even of our tears; but thou art resting on Abraham's bosom, where the tyrant can reach thee no more.

"Thou art taken away from the evil. Thou seest no longer Jerusalem trodden by the heathen, nor the abomination of desolation set up in the sanctuary of the Lord.

"Even as Isaac was laid on the altar, so didst thou yield thy body to death, and thy sacrifice is accepted.

"As the dead wood of Aaron's rod, cut off from the tree on which it had grown, yet blossomed and bare fruit; cut off as thou art in thy prime, thy memory shall blossom for ever.

"The three holy children trod unharmed the fiery furnace seven time heated. He who was with them was surely with thee; and the Angel of Death hath bidden thee come forth, naught harmed by the fire, save the bonds of flesh which thy free spirit hath left behind.

"To touch a dead body is counted pollution; to touch thine is rather consecration; for it is a holy thing which thou hast freely offered to God."

With peculiar tenderness the matron breathed her requiem over the seventh body as it was laid by the rest.

"Youngest and best-beloved of thy mother; thou flower of the spring, thou shalt slumber in peace on her bosom. Ye were lovely and pleasant in your lives, in your deaths ye are not divided."

It was with calm chastened sorrow that the last farewell had been spoken as the bodies of the martyred brethren had been placed in their quiet grave; but there was a bitterness of grief in the wail of the Hebrew woman over their mother, which made every word seem to Lycidas like a drop of blood wrung from the heart of the speaker.

"Blessed, oh, thrice blessed art thou, Solomona, my sister, richest of mothers in Israel! Thou hast borne seven, and amongst them not one has been false to his God. Thy diadem lacks no gem – thy circle of love is unbroken. Blessed she who, dying by her martyred sons, could say to her Lord: *Lo, I and the children whom Thou hast given me;*" and as the matron ended her lament, she tore her silver hair, rent her garments, and bowed her head with a gesture of uncontrollable grief.

All the bodies having been now reverentially placed in the grave, the chief rose from it, and joined his companions. Abishai then thus addressed him: —

"Hadassah hath made her lament. Son of Phineas, descendant of Aaron the high-priest of God, have you no word to speak over the grave of those who died for the faith?"

The chief lifted up his right hand towards heaven, and slowly repeated that sublime verse from Isaiah, which to those who lived in that remote period must have seemed as full of mystery as of consolation, — "*Thy dead shall live! My dead body shall they arise! Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew the dew of herbs, and the earth, shall cast out the dead.*"¹

The sound of that glorious promise of Scripture seemed to rouse Hadassah from her agonizing grief; she lifted up her bowed head, calm and serene as before. Turning to the veiled woman near her, she said, "We may not burn perfumes over these our honoured dead, but you, Zarah, my child, have brought living flowers for the burial, and their fragrance shall rise as incense. Cast them into the grave ere we close it."

Obedient to the command of her aged relative, the maiden whom Hadassah had addressed glided forward to the brink of the grave, and threw down into it a fragrant shower of blossoms. The movement threw back her veil, and there flashed upon Lycidas a vision of loveliness more exquisite than the poet had ever beheld even in his dreams, as the full stream of moonlight fell on the countenance of the fairest of all the daughters of Zion. Her long dark lashes drooped, moist with tears, as she performed her simple act of reverence towards her dead kinsmen; then Zarah raised her eyes with a mournful sweet expression, which was suddenly exchanged for a look of alarm — she started, and a faint cry escaped from her lips. The maiden had caught sight of the stranger crouching in the deep shadow, her eyes had met his — concealment was over — Lycidas was discovered!

¹ Isaiah xxvi. 19. It will be observed that interpolated italics are omitted.

CHAPTER III. LIFE OR DEATH

"A spy! a traitor! cut him down – hew him to pieces!" such were the cries, not loud but terrible, that, as thunder on flash, followed that exclamation from Zarah. Cold steel gleamed in the moonlight; Lycidas, who had scarcely before thought of his own personal danger, found himself in a moment surrounded by a furious band with weapons upraised to take his life. With the instinct of self-preservation the young Athenian sprang forwards, clasped the knees of the leader, and exclaimed, "No spy – no Syrian – no foe! as ye would find mercy in the hour of death, only hear me!" Then, ashamed at having been betrayed into showing what might look like cowardly fear, the Greek stood erect, but gasping, expecting that ere he could draw another breath he should feel the dagger in his side, or the sword at his throat.

"Hold – let him speak ere he die!" cried the leader; and, at his gesture of command, uplifted blades were arrested in air, and like leopards crouching in act to spring, the Hebrews surrounded their prisoner, to prevent the possibility of his making his escape.

"What would you say in your defence, young man?" asked the leader, in tones calm and stern. "Can you deny that you have been present as a spy at a scene to have witnessed which places the lives of all here assembled in your hands?"

"I am a Greek, an Athenian," said Lycidas, who had recovered his self-possession, and who intuitively felt that he was at the mercy of one who might be sternly just, but who would not be wantonly cruel. "I am here, but not as a spy – not to look with prying eyes upon your solemn and sacred rites. Led by chance to this spot, sleep overtook me under this tree. I would forfeit my right hand, nay, my life, rather than betray one engaged in the noble act which I have accidentally witnessed tonight."

"Will you hear him, the heathen dog, the son of Belial, the lying Gentile!" yelled out Abishai, his gleaming white teeth and flashing eyes giving to him an almost wolf-like ferocity of aspect, that well accorded with his cry for blood. "He was present – I know it – when our martyred brethren were slain; ay, he looked on their dying pangs! – tear him to pieces – set your heel on his neck – he has rejoiced at the slaughter of the just."

"No!" cried Lycidas with vehemence; "I call to witness the –"

"Stop his blaspheming tongue with the steel!" exclaimed Abishai furiously; "let him not profane our ears with the names of the demons whom he worships. Cut him off from the face of the earth – that grave will hold one body more – the blood of our brethren cries out for vengeance!"

Several voices echoed the fierce appeal, but amongst the wild cries for revenge, the ear of Lycidas, and the ear of the leader also, caught the maiden's faint exclamation, "Oh, Judas, have mercy! spare him!"

Still the extended hand of the chief alone kept back the fierce band who would have cut down their defenceless victim. But there was painful doubt on the brow of the leader; not that he was influenced by the demand for blood from Abishai and his fierce companions, but that he was aware of the extreme risk of setting the captive free. Lycidas felt that his fate hung on the lips of that calm princely man, and was almost satisfied that so it should be; a thought rose in the mind of the Greek, "If I must die, let it be by his hand."

"Stranger," began the son of Mattathias, and at the sound of his voice the tumult was hushed, and all stood silent to listen; "I doubt not your word, I thirst not for your blood – were my own life only at stake, not a hair of your head should be harmed. But on your silence as to what you have seen this night depends the safety of all here assembled, even of these daughters of Zion, for the tyrant spares not our women. We have no power to detain in captivity – we have but one way of ensuring

silence; would you yourself – with the grave of those martyrs before you – be able to reproach us with cruelty should we decide on taking that way?"

Lycidas met without blenching the calm sad eyes of the speaker, but he could not answer the question. He knew that under like circumstances neither Syrian nor Greek would feel hesitation before, or remorse after, what would be deemed a stern deed of necessity. The eloquent lips of the poet had no power to plead now for life.

"Why waste words!" exclaimed fierce Abishai; "why do you hesitate, Judas? One would scarce deem you to be the descendant of that Phineas who won deathless fame by smiting Zimri and Cosbi through with a dart. 'Thine eye shall not pity, nor thine hand spare.' Guilt lies on your head if you let Agag go. Was not the Canaanite to be rooted out of the land? Who dare bid us draw back when the Lord hath delivered the prey to our swords?"

"I dare – I do," cried Hadassah, advancing with dignity to the edge of the grove which separated her and her grand-daughter Zarah from the Hebrew men and their captive. "Shame on you, Abishai, man of blood. Yea, though you be the husband of my dead daughter, I repeat, shame on you to bring the name of the Lord to sanction your own thirst for vengeance! Hear me, son of Mattathias; ye men of Judah, hear me. The Merciful bids me speak, and I cannot refrain from speaking the words which He puts into my mouth."

The matron was evidently regarded with reverence by those who were present. Judas was related to her by blood, Abishai by marriage; two of the other five Hebrews had been her servants in her more prosperous days. But it was chiefly the dignity of Hadassah's character that gave weight to her speech; the widowed lady was regarded in Jerusalem almost as a prophetess, as one endued with wisdom from on high. Her pleading might not be effectual, but would at least be listened to with respect.

"The Canaanite was swept from the land," said Hadassah; "Zeba and Zalmunna were slain; Cosbi and Zimri were smitten through with a dart; but these were sinners whose cup of iniquity was full, and the swords of Israel executed God's righteous vengeance upon them, even as the waves of the sea overwhelmed Pharaoh, or the flood a world of transgressors. But the God of justice is the God also of mercy, slow to anger and plenteous in goodness. He calleth vengeance – though His work – His *strange work* (Isa. xxviii. 21). He hath given command, by His servant the Preacher, *If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink* (Prov. xxv. 21). *Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth; and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth*" (Prov. xxiv. 17).

"An enemy born of the house of Israel, not a vile Gentile," muttered one of the men who were present.

"Is the Lord the Maker only of the Jew; made He not the Gentile also?" cried Hadassah. "*Thou shalt not oppress a stranger*, saith the Lord, *seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt* (Ex. xxiii. 9). Did not Hobab the Midianite dwell among the people of Israel; was not Achior the Ammonite welcomed by the elders of Bethura; was not the blood of the Hittite required at the hand of David, and Ittai the Gittite found faithful when Israelites fell away from their king? God said of Cyrus the Persian, *He is my shepherd* (Isa. xlv. 28), and Alexander of Macedon was suffered to offer sacrifices to the Lord God of Jacob. Yea, hath not Isaiah the prophet declared that He, the Holy One, the Messiah, for whose coming we look, *shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles* (Isa. xlii. 1), *shall be a light of the Gentiles* (Isa. xlii. 6), that He will lift up His hand to the Gentiles (Isa. xlix. 22), so that their kings shall be nursing-fathers, and their queens nursing-mothers to His people (Isa. xlix. 23)? Ay, a time is coming – may it speedily come! – when the *idols He shall utterly abolish* (Isa. ii. 18), when the Lord's house shall be established, and all nations shall flow unto it (Isa. ii. 2), when *the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*" (Hab. ii. 14).

The noble features of the aged matron kindled as with inspiration, and as she raised her hand towards heaven, she seemed to call the Deity to confirm His glorious promises of mercy to the people yet walking in darkness.

A confused murmur rose amongst the listeners; if Hadassah's appeal had impressed some, it had stirred up in others the fierce jealousy which made so many Jews unwilling that the Gentiles should ever share the privileges of Abraham's race. The captive's life hung upon a slender thread, and he knew it.

"Hadassah," said the chief, addressing the widow with respect, "do you then require that we should trust this stranger, when – if he prove false – so many Hebrew lives will be the forfeit of confidence misplaced?"

"I require that you should trust Him who hath said, *Thou shalt do no murder*; who hath ordained that *whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed*. We show little faith when we think to find safety in transgressing the law of our God."

Again rose a fierce, angry murmur. Lycidas heard the words, "folly, madness, tempting Providence," mingled with imprecations on "dogs of heathen," "idolaters," "the polluted, the worshippers of graven images."

Judas laid hold on his javelin, which he had placed against the trunk of the olive when he had exchanged the weapon for the spade. The heart of Lycidas throbbed faster, he read his own death-warrant in the movement, but he braced his spirit to fall bravely, as became a fellow-citizen of Miltiades. Again there was profound silence, all awaiting what should follow that simple action of the leader.

"Time passes, every minute that we linger here is fraught with peril, our decision must be prompt," said Judas, and he motioned to Hadassah and Zarah to join the company of men on the side of the grave nearest to the stem of the tree. When they had done so, the son of Mattathias cast his javelin down on the ground. "Let those who would let the captive go free, those who would trust his gratitude and honour, pass over my javelin," cried Judas. "If the greater number cross it, we spare; if they remain here, we slay. Are you content?" he inquired.

There was a murmured "Content" from most of those present. The chief then turned his glance on Lycidas, and with stern courtesy repeated his question to the Greek. The young captive bowed his head, folded his arms, and answered "Content."

"The women shall not vote!" exclaimed Abishai. "They shall vote," said the chief, with decision; "their peril is equal to ours, and so shall their privilege be."

It was with strangely mingled emotions that Lycidas beheld, as it were, the balance raised, one of the scales of which was weighted with his freedom and life! Fear was scarcely the predominating feeling. A cloud for a few moments darkened the face of the moon, but through the shadow he could see the stately dark figure of Hadassah as she crossed over the javelin, and the flutter of Zarah's white veil. As the silver orb emerged from the cloud, the women were followed by the two Hebrews who had once been servants to Hadassah.

"Four on that side – five on this – he dies!" cried Abishai eagerly; but even as the exclamation was on his lips, Judas with a bound sprang over the javelin, and stood at the side of Zarah.

"He lives – the Merciful be praised!" cried Hadassah. Abishai, with a muttered curse, thrust back his thirsty blade into its sheath.

"Captive, depart in peace," said the son of Mattathias; "but ere you quit this spot, solemnly vow silence as to what you have witnessed here."

Lycidas instantly obeyed. "May I share the torments of those whose grave – but for your mercy – I should have shared, if I ever prove false to my oath," cried the Greek.

The chief waved his hand to bid him depart, and leave the Hebrews to complete the solemn work which his appearance had interrupted.

Lycidas, however, showed no haste to escape. He glanced towards Hadassah and Zarah. "May I not speak my gratitude," he began, advancing one step towards them; but the widow by a gesture forbade his nearer approach.

"Live your gratitude, speak it not, stranger," said she. "If ever you see son or daughter of Abraham in peril, remember this night; if ever your enemy stand defenceless before you, remember this night. And when next you would bow down before an idol, and pray – as your people pray – to the deaf wood and the senseless stone, pause and reflect first upon what you have learned on this sacred spot of the faith of the Hebrews," Hadassah pointed to the open grave as she spoke, "how it can nerve the weak to suffer, and induce the strong to spare!"

CHAPTER IV. FOLLOWING BEHIND

As he quitted that place of burial, which he had little expected to leave alive, Lycidas felt like one under an enchanter's spell. Joy at almost unhoped-for escape from a violent death was not the emotion uppermost in his mind, and it became the less so with every step which the Athenian took from the olive-grove. Strange as the feeling appeared even to himself, the young poet could almost have wished the whole scene acted over again, notwithstanding the painfully prominent part which he had had to play in it. Lycidas would not have been unwilling to have heard again the fierce cries and execrations, and to have seen once more the flashing weapons around him, for the sake of also hearing the soft appeal, "Have mercy, spare him!" and to have had another glimpse of Zarah's form and face, as, with a halo of moonlight and loveliness around her, she dropped her tribute of living flowers into the grave of the dead.

"These Hebrew women are not as the women of earth, but beings that belong to a higher sphere," thought Lycidas, as he pursued his way towards the city. "That aged matron has all the majesty of a Juno, and the maiden is fair as – nay, to which of the deities of Olympus could I compare one so tender and so pure! Venus! the idea were profanation – chaste Dian with her merciless arrows – Pallas, terrible to her enemies? no! Strange that it should seem an insult to the women to compare her to the goddess!"

Lycidas gazed upwards at the exquisite blue of that Eastern sky, and around him at the fair landscape of hills and valleys calmly sleeping in moonlight. A thrilling sense of beauty pervaded his soul.

"Oh, holy and beneficent Nature," he murmured, "hast thou no voice to explain to men through thy visible glories the mysteries of the invisible! Dost thou not even now whisper to my soul, 'purity and goodness are the attributes of Divinity, for they are stamped upon the works of creation; and so must purity and goodness be the badge of the Divinity's true worshippers on earth!' There is a spirit stirring within the breast that echoes this voice of Nature, that repeats, 'purity and goodness, not power and might, give the highest dignity to mortal or immortal!' But if it be so, if my hand have touched the mighty veil which shrouds the truth from man's profane gaze, if I have a glimpse of the sacred mystery beyond, how far from that truth, in what a mist of error must all the nations of earth be wandering now!" Lycidas unconsciously slackened his steps, and raised his hand to his brow. "Perhaps not all," he reflected; "from what I hear it appears that this Hebrew nation, this handful of conquered people groaning in bondage, hold themselves to be the sole guardians of a faith which is lofty, soul-ennobling, and pure. They deem themselves to be as a beacon on a hill set on high, throughout ages past, to show a dark world that there is still light, and a light which shall yet overspread the earth as the waters cover the sea; those were the words of Hadassah. And she spake also of One who should come, One looked for by the Jews, who shall bring judgment unto the Gentiles. Do the Hebrews hope for the advent of a Deity upon earth, or only that of a prophet? I would that I could see Hadassah again; and I will see her – I will never give up the search for one who can guide unto knowledge; come what may, I will look upon her and on that beauteous maiden again!"

Absorbed as he was by such thoughts, there is little wonder that the young Athenian missed his way, and that he unconsciously wandered in a direction different from that which he had intended to take. The moonlight also failed him, clouds had arisen, and only now and then a fitful gleam fell on his path. Lycidas became at last uncertain even as to the direction in which Jerusalem lay. The young Athenian was weary, less from physical fatigue than from the effects of strong excitement upon a sensitive frame. Sometimes he fancied now that he heard a stealthy step behind him, and stopped to listen, then felt assured that his senses must have deceived him, and went on his way, groping through

the darkness. What a strange episode in his existence that night appeared to the Greek – scarcely a mere episode, for it seemed to him that it absorbed into itself all the true poetry of his life as regarded the past, and gave him new aspirations and hopes as regarded the future. To Lycidas the remembrance of his poetical triumph in the Olympic arena, the plaudits which had then filled his soul with ecstatic delight, was little more than to a man is the recollection of the toys which amused his childhood. The Greek had been brought face to face with life's grand realities, and what had strongly excited his ambition once, appeared to him now as shadows that pass away.

"And yet," mused the young poet, "I would fain once more win the leafy crown, that I might lay it at Zarah's feet. But what would such a trophy of earthly distinction be to her? not worth one of the flowers, hallowed by her touch, which she cast into the martyrs' grave! Ha! again! I fancied that I heard a rustle of garments behind me! How powerful is the imagination, that mirage of the mind, that makes us fancy the existence of things that are not!"

Lycidas had now reached a part of the road which bordered an abrupt descent to the left, the hill along whose side the path wound appearing to have been scarped in this place, probably to leave wider space for some vine-clad terrace below. Lights were gleaming in the far distance, marking the position of the city in which the guests of Antiochus, preceded by torch-bearers, were wending their way back to their several homes. Sounds of wild mirth, from those reeling back from the revels, were faintly borne on the night breeze from the distant streets.

Lycidas, however, when he reached the point whence the lights were visible, was not left a moment either to gaze or to listen.

"Dog of a Gentile – I have you!" hissed a voice from behind; and Lycidas was instantly engaged in a life or death hand-to-hand struggle with Abishai the Jew, who, as soon as he could steal away from his companions at the grave, had followed and dogged the steps of the Greek. It was almost a hopeless struggle for the young Athenian; his enemy surpassed him in strength of muscle and weight of body, wore a dagger, and was determined to use it, though some wild sense of honour had prevented Abishai from stabbing the unconscious youth without warning, when he stole upon him from behind. But the love of life is strong, and desperation gives almost supernatural power. Lycidas felt the keen blade strike him once and again, he felt his blood gushing warm from the wounds, he caught the arm uplifted to smite, with despair's fierce energy he endeavoured to wrench the murderous weapon away. The two men went wrestling, struggling, straining each sinew to the utmost, drawing nearer, inch by inch, to the brink of the steep descent. Abishai dropped his dagger in the struggle, and could not stoop to attempt to recover it in the darkness, but he grasped with his sinewy hand the gasping youth by the locks, and, with a gigantic effort, hurled him over the edge.

With dilating eyeballs and a look of fierce triumph Abishai leant over the brink, trying to distinguish through the deepening gloom the lifeless form of his victim.

"I have silenced the Gentile once and for ever!" cried the fierce Hebrew through his clenched teeth. "I said not 'Content' when the question was put, but I say it now!" He drew back from the edge, wiped the moisture from his heated brow, and left a red stain upon it.

"Ere I go to rest," said the stern Jew, "I will let Hadassah know that my arm has achieved that safety for her and our brave companions which her wild folly would have sacrificed. I marvel that Judas, son of Mattathias, a bold man, and deemed a wise one, should have let himself be swayed from his purpose by the idle words of a woman. But I trow," added Abishai with a grim smile, "that a glance from Zarah went further with him than all the pleadings of Hadassah. It is said amongst us, their kinsmen, that these twain shall be made one; but this is no time for marrying and giving in marriage, when the unclean swine is sacrificed on God's altar, and the shadow of the idol darkens the Temple, and the sons of Abraham are given but the alternative to defile themselves or to die. The day of vengeance is at hand! may all the enemies of Judah perish as that poor wretch has perished this night!"

Abishai sought for his dagger, and found it; he then left the scene of his act of ruthless cruelty, with a conscience less troubled by so dark a deed than it would have been had he rubbed corn between his hands on the Sabbath, or neglected one of the washings prescribed by the traditions of the elders.

CHAPTER V. THE DREAM

At sunrise on the following morning two women were seated on the ground, in the back part of a small flat-roofed house, situated in a very secluded spot amongst the hills, not a mile from Jerusalem. They sat opposite to each other, engaged – after the manner of the East – in grinding corn, by moving round, by means of handles, the upper millstone upon the nether one.

The room in which they were, if room it could be termed, was a narrow place on the ground-floor, partitioned off from a larger apartment, and devoted to holding stores, and other such domestic uses. Here corn was ground, rice sifted from the husk, and occasionally weaving carried on. Large bunches of raisins hung on the walls, jars of olive-oil and honey were neatly ranged on the floor; nor lacked there stores of millet, lentiles, and dried figs, such being the food on which chiefly subsisted the dwellers in that lonely home. A curtain, now drawn aside divided this store-place from the larger front room, which opened to the road in front. It had a door communicating with a small patch of cultivated ground behind, in which were a few flowers tended by women's hands, the fairest clustering round a bright little spring which gushed from the hill on whose steepest side the small habitation seemed to nestle.

One of the women, busy with the laborious task of grinding, was a Hebrew servant, past the prime of her days, but still strong to work; the other was fair and young, her delicate frame, her slender fingers, looking little suited for manual labour. With a very sad countenance and a heavy heart sat Zarah that morning at the millstone, engaged in her monotonous task. It was not that she was unwilling to spend her strength in humble toil, or that she murmured because her grandmother Hadassah had no longer men-servants and but one maid-servant to do her bidding. Zarah had too much of the spirit of a Ruth to shrink from work, or to complain of poverty, if shared with one who was to her as a mother; nay, her cheerfulness at labour was wont to gush forth in song. It was not a personal trial that now made the tears flow from Zarah's lustrous eyes, as she slowly turned round the millstone; no selfish sorrow drew heavy sighs from her bosom, as she murmured to herself, "Oh, cruel – cruel!"

"Peace be unto you, my child. You are early, and it was late ere you could retire to rest," said the voice of Hadassah, as, pale and sad in aspect, the widow lady entered the apartment.

Zarah arose from her humble posture, approached her grandmother, first meekly kissed the hem of her garment, and then received her tender embrace.

"I could not sleep," faltered the maiden; "I dared not close my eyes lest I should dream some dream of horror. Oh, ruthless Abishai, most cruel of men! will not the All-merciful, who cares for the stranger, require that young Greek's blood at his hand?" – Zarah covered her face and wept.

"His was an unrighteous and wicked deed," said Hadassah.

"And it was I who betrayed the stranger," sobbed Zarah. "It was my start and exclamation which directed the murderer's eyes to his place of concealment! I shall never be happy again!"

"Nay, you did no wrong, my white dove," said Hadassah, tenderly drawing the maiden closer to her bosom; "the guilt lies on the head of Abishai, and on his head alone. Had he not been the beloved of my dead Miriam, my only daughter, never more should that man of blood cross the threshold of Hadassah."

"I never wish to look on Abishai again!" cried Zarah, with as much of anger as her gentle nature was capable of feeling, flashing from under her long dark lashes. "He might have trusted one whom Judas could trust; the face of that Greek was a face which could not deceive;" and the maiden added, but not aloud, "the stranger – when he stood with folded arms, so calm, so beauteous, so noble, and bowed his head, and said 'Content' when his life was trembling in the balance – looked to me as one of

the goodly angels that came to Sodom at eve! Better, if he must needs die, that the Greek should have fallen by the javelin of my brave kinsman Judas, than by the dagger of Abishai. Mother," cried Zarah, suddenly raising her head, and looking into the face of Hadassah with an earnest, pleading gaze, "may we not hope that the stranger's soul has found mercy with God? How could the young Gentile worship One whom he knew not? – his blindness was inherited from his parents – he did not wilfully turn away from the light! Oh, say that you think that the All-merciful has had compassion on the murdered Greek! did not the Lord spare Nineveh – pitied He not even the little ones and the cattle?"

"I do think it – I do firmly believe it," said Hadassah, raising her eyes towards heaven; "verily the dream that visited me last night must have been sent to assure me of this."

"Tell me your dream, mother," cried Zarah, who always addressed by this title the parent of her father.

"Come with me into the front room, my child; leave Anna to prepare our pottage of lentiles, and I will tell you my dream," said Hadassah, leading the way into what might, in a European dwelling, have been called the sitting-room. This, with the place which they had just quitted, and two sleeping apartments above, which were reached by a rough stair on the exterior of the dwelling, constituted all the accommodation of Hadassah's small house, if we except the flat roof, surrounded by a parapet, often used by the ladies as a cool and airy retreat.

Hadassah and her grand-daughter seated themselves in a half-reclining posture upon skins that were spread on the tiled floor; and while Zarah listened with glistening eyes, the Hebrew widow told her dream to the maiden.

"Methought, in the visions of the night – for I snatched a brief hour of repose after our return from the burial – I beheld two women before me. They were both goodly to look upon, with a strange spiritual beauty not seen on this side of the tomb. The feet of the women rested not on the earth, but they gently floated above it; the air seemed purpled around them, and fragrant with the odour of myrrh. The first woman bore in her hand a scarlet cord, the other a bundle of golden corn.

"'Hadassah,' said the first, 'I am Rahab, of the doomed race of Canaan, yet received as a daughter of Abraham. For the sake of David, born of my line, and for the sake of Him who was the Root of Jesse (Isa. xi. 10) and shall be the Branch (Isa. xi. 1), have pity upon the stranger.'

"And the second woman, who was exceeding fair, spoke to me in like manner: 'Hadassah, I am Ruth, of the guilty race of Moab, yet received as a daughter of Abraham. For the sake of David, born of my line, and for the sake of Him who was the Root of Jesse and shall be the Branch, have pity upon the stranger.' And so the two bright visitants vanished – and I awoke."

"Would that your dream had been sent to Abishai!" exclaimed Zarah; "then might he not through life have borne the brand-mark of Cain!"

"Hark!" cried Hadassah, suddenly; "was that a groan that I heard?"

Zarah had heard the sound also, and was on her feet and at the door before Hadassah had ended the sentence.

"Oh, mother – it is he – the stranger – he is dying!" exclaimed Zarah, trembling as she bent over the form of Lycidas, which lay stretched on the ground, close to the threshold.

The injuries which the young Greek had received from the dagger and the fall, though severe and dangerous, had not proved fatal. The fresh morning air had restored him to consciousness; unable to rise, Lycidas had yet managed to drag himself feebly along for some distance, till, as he reached the nearest dwelling, the strength of the Athenian had utterly failed him, and he had swooned at the door of Hadassah.

"Bear him in – he bleeds!" said Hadassah; and after calling the strong-armed Anna to aid them, the Hebrew ladies themselves carried the senseless form of the stranger into the house, and beyond the curtain-partition into that back portion of the dwelling described in the beginning of this chapter. For some time undivided attention was given to efforts to restore consciousness to the wounded man. Hadassah, like many of her countrywomen, had knowledge of the healing art. Zarah brought of the

balm of Gilead and reviving wine; Anna dragged into the inner room mats and skins, that the sufferer might have something softer to rest upon than the hard floor. Zarah and the servant then retired, by the order of Hadassah, leaving her to examine and bind up the wounds of Lycidas, which she did with tenderness and skill. When all had been done which could be done, Hadassah drew aside the curtain-screen, and rejoined Zarah and Anna in the front apartment, where the latter was engaged in removing the crimson stains left by the wounded Greek on the floor and threshold.

"Go on the road, Anna," said the widow; "carefully efface any marks by which a wounded man could be tracked to my dwelling. No one must know that the stranger is here."

"If Abishai heard of it, even your roof would not protect the youth," said Zarah, turning pale at the thought of a repetition, in the sacred precincts of home, of the horrible scene of the previous night. "Oh, mother, think you that the stranger will live?"

"He may; youth can swim through stormy waters," replied Hadassah; "but – may I be forgiven the inhospitable thought! – I would that the Greek had come to any other house rather than to mine."

"So few visitors ever seek this spot – so few strangers ever pass it – we lead lives so retired – we can, better than most, conceal a guest," observed Zarah.

The brow of Hadassah was clouded still. In that small dwelling, with a fair girl under her care, the widow lady was unwilling to harbour for weeks, or more probably months, a man, and that man a Gentile. Anxiously she revolved the matter in her mind, but no other course seemed to open before her. She could not be guilty of the cruelty of turning the helpless sufferer out to die.

"On Abishai's account," said Hadassah, "I dare not seek out the friends of the Greek, if friends he have in Jerusalem, and ask them to bear him thence. To do that, after Abishai's murderous attempt on his life, would be to deliver over Miriam's husband to the executioner's sword. This young man is bound alike by honour and gratitude to preserve silence as to what passed by the grave; but there is nothing to prevent him from seeking, and much to induce him to seek, retribution on a would-be assassin, who violated the pledge of safety given to the Greek. Would, I repeat, that this stranger had come to any house rather than mine!"

"Mother, remember your dream!" exclaimed Zarah, who, in the secret depths of her heart, did not share Hadassah's regret. Compassion for the suffering – admiration for the beautiful and brave, – combined to awaken in the maiden strong interest in the fate of the stranger. Zarah was well pleased that her grandmother's hospitality should be to him some reparation for a deep wrong sustained from one of her family.

"Yes," said Hadassah, thoughtfully; "that dream must have been sent to prepare me for this. The Lord hath given me a work to perform, and He will not let His servant suffer for striving to do His bidding. The wounded stranger, Gentile though he be, needs hospitality, and I dare not refuse it. If the Lord hath guided him to the home of Hadassah, the Lord will send a blessing with him." And trying to stifle her misgivings, the widow lady returned to her guest.

CHAPTER VI. THE JOURNEY HOME

Before the sun had risen above the horizon on that day, Judas, son of Mattathias, of the noble family of the Asmoneans, started on his long homeward journey. He had not re-entered Jerusalem during the night; almost as soon as he, with the assistance of Joab and Isaac, two of his companions, had filled up with earth the grave of the martyrs, he had skirted the city from the east to the west, and turned his face towards Modin.

It would scarcely have been deemed by any one who might have seen the princely Hebrew ascending the western hill with his quick, firm tread, that the greater part of the preceding night had been spent by him in severe toil, and none in sleep. His soul, filled with a lofty purpose, so mastered the infirmities of the flesh, that the Asmonean seemed to himself scarcely capable of feeling fatigue, and set out, without hesitation, on a journey which would have severely taxed the powers of a strong pedestrian after long uninterrupted repose.

As he reached the highest point of one of these hills which stand round Jerusalem, like guardians of the holy and beautiful city, Judas paused and turned round to take what he felt might be a last look of Zion, over which the sun was about to rise. He gazed on the fair towers, the girdling walls, the sepulchres in the valleys, the temple crowning the height, with that intense love which glows in the bosom of every Hebrew deserving the name, a love in which piety mingles with patriotism, glorious memories with still more glorious hopes. From the Asmonean's lips burst the words in which the Psalmist has embalmed that love for all generations, – *Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, the city of the great King. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning; if I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth.*

Faith was to the Asmonean as the rosy glow preceding the sunrise, which then flushed the eastern sky. His eye rested on the Temple; now desecrated, defiled, abandoned to the Gentile, and he remembered the promise regarding it: *The Lord whom ye seek, shall suddenly come, to His Temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant whom ye delight in* (Mal. iii. 8). Then the Hebrew's gaze wandered beyond to a fair hill, clothed with verdure, and his faith grasped the promise of God: *Then shall the Lord go forth... and His feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives* (Zech. xiv. 3, 4). Hope and joy were kindled at the thought. As surely as the hill itself should remain, so surely should a Temple stand on Mount Zion, till the Messiah should appear within it. *God is not a man, that He should lie; neither the son of man, that He should repent: hath He said, and shall He not do it?* (Num. xxiii. 19).

"Oh, that the Messiah might come in my day!" exclaimed the Asmonean; "that my eyes might behold the King in His beauty; that my voice might join the united acclamations of Israel, when the Son of David shall be seated on the throne of His fathers, and His enemies shall be made His footstool! That I might see the whole world worshipping in the presence of the Seed of the woman who shall bruise the serpent's head!" (Gen. iii. 15). The Hebrew grasped his javelin more firmly, and his dark eye dilated with joy and triumph. "But the night is not yet past for Israel," he added, more sadly; "the voice is not yet *heard in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord* (Isa. xl. 8); we may have yet much to do and to suffer ere the Sun of Righteousness arise."

Then a softened expression stole over the features of the Asmonean, as he gazed in another direction, but still with his face turned towards the east. He could not see a white dwelling nestling under the shadow of a hill, but he knew well where it lay, and where she abode to whom he had bidden on that night a long, perhaps a last, farewell. The Asmonean stretched out his hand, and exclaimed,

"Oh! Father of the fatherless, guard and bless her! To Thy care I commit the treasure of my soul!" And without trusting himself to linger longer, Judas turned and went on his way.

It was the month of Shebet, answering to the latter part of our January, and Palestine was already bright with the beauty of early spring. The purple mandrake was in flower, the crocus, tulip, and hyacinth enamelled the fields, with the blue lily contrasting with thousands of scarlet anemones. The almond-tree and the peach were in flower, and fragrant sighed the breeze over blossoms of lemon and citron. The winter had this year been mild, and some figs left from the last season still clung to the boughs yet bare of foliage. The vine on the terraced hills was bursting into leaf, and already in the fields the rising corn showed its young blades above the ground. But Judas was too much absorbed with his own thoughts to pay much attention to the landscape around him; with Israel the spiritual winter was not over, her time for the singing of birds had not come.

Onwards pressed the traveller without resting, till at about noonday he reached the valley of Ajalon. There was a fountain by the side of the road, and here the weary man slaked his thirst, and sat down for awhile to rest beneath the shade of some date-palms. The Asmonean took from the scrip which he carried his simple repast of dried figs, laved his brow and hands in the cooling water, blessed God for his food, and began to eat.

Ere many minutes had elapsed, a woman in the widow's garb of mourning, bearing a child of about six years old on her back, dragged her weary steps to the fountain by which the traveller was seated. She placed her boy on the ground, drank of the water herself, and gave to her son to drink. Her appearance denoted extreme poverty, and the child was evidently suffering from sickness.

Judas divided this slender supply of provisions into three portions, and with the courteous salutation of "Peace be with you," offered one to the widow, and one to the boy.

"The blessing of the God of Abraham be with you!" exclaimed the poor woman; "your servant hath not tasted food since sunset." And, seated on the turf not far from Judas, the widow and her son partook of the dried figs with the eagerness of those who are well-nigh famished.

"Your child looks ill," observed the Asmonean, regarding with compassion the wasted shrunken frame of the boy.

"He will not suffer long," replied the widow, with the calm apathy of despair. "I laid his father's head in the grave last month, and I shall lay Terah's head beside him this month. The seal of death is upon him; I shall soon be alone in the world."

"Nay, despair not, God is good; the child may yet live," said Judas.

"Why should I wish him to live," murmured the widow. "His father was taken from the evil to come, the boy will be taken from the evil to come. Jerusalem is defiled, the land is in bondage, Israel is given a prey to the heathen! The faithful are few in the land, and persecution will sweep these few away. There is no resting-place but under the sod, no freedom but in the grave. The name of Judah will soon be blotted out from amongst the nations!"

"Never!" exclaimed Judas, with energy; "never, while the God of Truth lives and reigns! Judah can never perish. The vine that was brought out of Egypt may be broken, her branches torn away, her fruit scattered, the boar out of the wood may waste it, and the wild beast of the field devour, but yet *Israel shall blossom and bud, and fill the face of the world with fruit* (Isa. xxvii. 6). Were but one man left of God's chosen people, yet from that one man should spring the Deliverer who shall yet speak peace to the nations, and reign for ever and ever!"

"Could I but hope –" faltered the widow.

"Can you not *believe*?" exclaimed the Asmonean. "See yonder – look to the east – there is Gibeon, over which the sun stayed at the voice of Joshua; over this valley of Ajalon hung the moon arrested in her course in the day when the Amorites fled before Israel. He who raised up Moses, Joshua, and Gideon, can by human instruments, or without them, repeat the miracles wrought of old, and again deliver His people."

As he concluded the last sentence, the Asmonean rose to continue his journey; he could give his weary limbs but little time for rest, for long was the distance which he yet had to traverse.

"My home is but a furlong further on," said the widow, also rising, "and I have again strength to go forward."

She was about to lift up her boy, but Judas prevented her. "I can relieve you of that burden," he said, and raised the child on his shoulders.

They had proceeded for some way in silence, the widow pondering over the speech of the wayfaring man, when from behind was heard the clatter of hoofs and the jingle of steel. The child, whom the Asmonean was carrying, turned to gaze, and exclaimed in fear as he grasped the locks of his protector, "See – horsemen in bright armour, with banners and spears! fly, fly! – the Syrians are coming!"

Judas did not turn nor alter his pace, he merely went closer to the side of the cactus-bordered road, to give more space to the horsemen to pass him. On rode the Syrians in goodly array, their steel glittering in the sunlight, the dust rising like a cloud around the hoofs of their horses. In the centre of the line was a gorgeous arabah, or covered cart with curtains, to which the troop of soldiers appeared to form an escort. There was an opening in the roof of this arabah, evidently for the convenience of accommodating within it a figure too high to be otherwise carried in the conveyance, for out of the opening appeared a white marble head of Grecian statuary. Judas and his companion regarded it with the aversion and horror with which the sight of an idol always inspired pious Jews.

When the Syrians had passed the travellers, and the clatter of their arms had died away in the distance, the widow wrung her hands and exclaimed, "Yonder ride Apelles and his men of war to Modin, to do the bidding of the tyrant; and they bear the accursed thing with them, to be set up on high and worshipped. Alas! they will compel all the Hebrews at Modin to bow down to their idol of stone."

"Perhaps not," said Judas, calmly.

"All men will be forced to offer sacrifice," cried the woman; "there will be no way of escaping the pollution."

"Solomona and her sons found one way," observed the Asmonean, "and God may provide yet another."

The traveller had now reached the door of the widow's humble dwelling. Judas set down his living burden, and the mother thanked the kind stranger, and asked him to come in and rest.

"I cannot abide here," replied Judas; "a long journey is yet before me;

I must be at Modin this night."

"At Modin!" exclaimed the astonished woman, glancing up at the worn weary countenance of the speaker. "Why, the horsemen will scarcely reach Modin this night, unless, indeed, the king's business be urgent."

"My King's business is urgent," said the Asmonean, as he tightened his girdle around him, and with a grave, courteous salutation to the woman, he went on his way.

The widow watched his princely form for some time in silence, then exclaimed, "That can be none other than Judas, the son of Mattathias; there is not a second Hebrew such as he. Ah, my Terah," she added, addressing herself to her son, "there is a man whom the Syrians will not frighten."

"He will rather frighten the Syrians," said the boy.

Many a time was that childish saying repeated in after-days, as if it had been prophetic, when Judah had long had rest from her foes, and Terah himself was an old man. When he sat beneath his own vine and fig-tree, no man making him afraid, he never wearied describing to his grand-children that form which had made the earliest impression which his memory had retained. He would speak with kindling enthusiasm of the princely man who had taken him in his arms and carried him on his shoulders – who had been as tender to a sick child, as he had afterwards been terrible to Israel's foes.

The sun had just sunk when the foot of the Asmonean trod the green valley of Sharon. It was well that from thence every step of the way was familiar to Judas, for he had soon no light but that

of the stars to guide him. The wind was rising; it rustled amidst the tamarisks, and shook the leafy crests of the evergreen palms; it bore to the ear of the almost exhausted traveller the wild howl of the jackals, rising higher and higher in pitch, like the wail of a human being in distress. Weary indeed and footsore was the Asmonean, but still he bravely pressed forward, till at length he heard the welcome sound of the waves of the Mediterranean lashing the coast near which stood Modin, about an English mile from the town of Joppa.

Thankful was Judas to reach his father's home, where, the heavy strain upon his powers being for awhile relaxed, he slept the deep sweet sleep of the weary, after a journey which could have been accomplished on foot in a single day only by a man possessing great powers of endurance, as well as physical strength.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIRST STRUGGLE

The arrival of Apelles, the emissary of Antiochus Epiphanes, had thrown the town of Modin into a state of great excitement. A proclamation was made in the morning of the following day, that all the inhabitants, men, women, and children, should assemble in the market-place at noon, to obey the mandate of the king, by worshipping at an altar of Bacchus, which was erected at that spot. "Curses, not loud but deep," were muttered in many a Hebrew home. Some of the Syrian soldiers had been quartered for the night with the inhabitants of Modin. The fatted calf had to be killed, the best wine poured out, for idolatrous guests whose very presence polluted a banquet. The Syrians repaid the reluctant hospitality of their hosts by recital of all the horrors of the persecution in Jerusalem. They told of the barbarities perpetrated on Solomona and her sons; shuddering women clasped their children closer to their bosoms as they heard how two mothers had been flung from the battlements at the south side of the Temple, with their infants hung round their necks, because they had dedicated those martyr babes to God in the way commanded by Moses. Such examples of cruelty struck terror into the hearts of all whose faith and courage were not strong. It was evident that Antiochus was terribly in earnest, and that if his wrath were aroused by opposition, the horrors which had been witnessed at Jerusalem might be repeated at Modin. The plea of terrible necessity half silenced the consciences of many Hebrews who secretly abhorred the rites of the heathen. A quantity of ivy was gathered, and twined by unwilling hands, to be worn in honour of the false deity whose worship was to be forced upon a reluctant people.

A lofty shrine on which was raised a marble image of the god of wine, with his temples crowned with ivy, a bunch of grapes in his hand, and sensuality stamped on every feature, was erected in the centre of the market-place. Before it was the altar of sacrifice, and around this, as the hour of noon approached, collected a motley crowd. There were the white-robed priests of Bacchus, with the victims chosen for sacrifice. Men of war, both on foot and on horseback, formed a semicircle about the shrine, to enforce, if necessary, compliance with the decree of the Syrian monarch. Apelles himself, magnificently attired, with tunic of Tyrian purple, jewelled sandals, and fringes of gold, sat on a lofty seat on the right side of the altar, awaiting the appointed time when the sun should reach his meridian height. Numbers of people filled the market-place, of both sexes, and of every age, for the soldiery had swept through Modin, forcing all the inhabitants to quit their dwellings and assemble to offer sacrifice upon the altar of Bacchus.

Directly opposite to the altar there was one group of Hebrews conspicuous above all the rest, and towards this group the eyes of the assembled people were frequently turned. There stood Mattathias, with snowy beard descending to his girdle – a venerable patriarch, surrounded by his five stalwart sons. There appeared Johannan, the first-born; Simon, with his calm intellectual brow; Eleazar, with his quick glance of fire; Jonathan; and Judas, third in order of birth, but amongst those illustrious brethren already first in fame. In stern silence the Asmonean family watched the preparations made by the Syrian priests to celebrate their unhallowed rites. Not a word escaped the lips of the Hebrews; they stood almost as motionless as statues, only their glances betraying the secret indignation of their souls.

Mattathias, as a direct descendant of Aaron through Phineas, and a man of great wisdom and spotless integrity, possessed great influence within his native city of Modin. Disputes were referred to his decision, his judgment was appealed to in cases of difficulty, and his example was likely to carry with it greater weight than that of any other man in Judaea. Apelles was perfectly aware of this. "Mattathias once gained, all is gained," the Syrian courtier had said to the king before departing on

his mission to Modin; "the old man's sons have no law but his will, and if the Asmoneans bow their heads in worship, all Judaea will join in offering sacrifice to your gods."

Anxious to win over by soft persuasions the only Hebrews whose opposition could cause any difficulty in the execution of the king's commands, when the hour for offering sacrifice had almost arrived, Apelles descended from his seat of state, and approached the Asmonean group. This unexpected movement of the Syrian awakened eager attention amongst the assembled crowds.

"Venerable Mattathias," said Apelles, saluting the old man with stately courtesy, "your high position, your wide-spread fame, entitle you to the place of leader in performing the solemn act by which Modin at once declares her fealty to our mighty monarch, Antiochus Epiphanes, and her devotion to the worship of Bacchus. Now, therefore, come you first and fulfil the king's commandment, like as all the heathen have done, yea, and the men of Judah also, and such as remain at Jerusalem; so shall you and your house be in the number of the king's friends, and you and your children shall be honoured with silver and gold and many rewards." When the Syrian had ceased speaking, the silence amongst the expectant people was so profound that the roll of the billows on the beach, and the scream of a white-winged sea-bird, could be distinctly heard.

Sternly the old man had heard Apelles to the end; then fixing upon him the keen eyes which flashed under the white overhanging brows, like volcano fire bursting from beneath a mountain crest of snow, he replied, in tones so loud that they rang all over the market-place, "Though all the nations that are under the king's dominion obey him, and fall away every one from the religion of their fathers, and give consent to his commandments, yet will I and my sons and my brethren walk in the covenant of our fathers. God forbid that we should forsake the law and the ordinances! We will not hearken to the king's words to go from our religion, either on the right hand or the left."

Hardly had the brave words died on the ears of those who heard them, when, in strange contrast, there sounded a hymn in honour of Bacchus, and, gaily dressed and crowned with ivy, a wretched apostate Jew, eager to win the king's favour by being the first to obey his will, came forward singing towards the altar. All the blood of Phineas boiled in the veins of his descendant; was the Lord of Hosts to be thus openly insulted, His judgments thus impiously defied! Forward sprang the old Asmonean, as if once more endowed with youth, one moment his dagger glittered in the sunlight, the next moment the apostate groaned out his soul upon the altar of Bacchus!

To execute justice in this summary manner, and before all the people, was indeed to draw the sword and throw the scabbard away. A fierce shout for vengeance arose from the Syrian soldiers, and their ranks closed around Mattathias, but not around him alone. Not for a minute had his sons deserted his side, and now, like lions at bay, they united in the defence of their father. Nor were they to maintain the struggle unaided. There were Hebrews amongst the assembled crowds to whom the voice of Mattathias had been as the trumpet-call to the war-horse; there were men who counted their holy faith as dearer than life. These, with shouts, rushed to the rescue, and the market-place of Modin became the scene of a hand-to-hand desperate struggle, where discipline and numbers on the one side, devotion, heroism, and a good cause on the other, maintained a fearful strife. Though sharp, it was but a brief one. The fight was thickest near the altar – around it flowed the blood of human victims; there the powerful arm of Judas laid Apelles lifeless in the dust. This was the crisis of the struggle, for at the fall of their leader the Syrians were seized with sudden panic. The horses, whose trappings had glittered so gaily, were either urged by their riders to frantic speed, or dashed with emptied saddles through the throng, to carry afar the news of defeat. Flight was all that was left to the troops of Antiochus or the priests of Bacchus, and few succeeded in making their escape, for many Jews who had stood aloof from the struggle joined in the pursuit. The very women caught up stones from the path to fling at the flying foe; children's voices swelled the loud shout of triumph. The altar of Bacchus was thrown down with wild exultation; the idol was broken to pieces, and its fragments were rolled in the blood-stained dust. Those Jews who had shown most fear an hour before, now by more furious zeal tried to efface from other minds and their own the memory of their former

submission. One spirit seemed to animate all – the spirit of freedom! Modin had arisen like Samson, when he snapped the green withes and went forth to the fight with the strength of a giant.

But this was an ebullition of zeal likely to be more fiery than lasting. Mattathias little trusted that courage which only follows in the train of success. The old man knew that the struggle with the power of Syria was only commencing; that it would probably be long protracted, and that it would be impracticable to defend Modin against the hosts which would soon be sent to assail it. The patriarch stood in the centre of the market-place, with his foot on the fragments of the broken altar, and once more his loud clear voice rang far and wide. "Whosoever is zealous of the law, and maintaineth the Covenant, let him follow me! Let us away to the mountains, ye men of Judah!"

How many of the inhabitants of Modin obeyed the call? how many resolved to leave city and home, to dwell with the beasts in the caves of the mountains? History relates that but a little band of ten, inclusive of the Asmoneans, by retiring to the fastnesses of the mountains, formed the nucleus of that brotherhood of heroes who were to wrest victory after victory from the hosts of Syria, and win that unsullied fame which belongs only to those who display firm endurance and devoted courage in a righteous and holy cause.

CHAPTER VIII. HADASSAH'S GUEST

In no place were the tidings of the rising at Modin received with greater exultation than in the lonely dwelling of Hadassah. The Hebrew widow could hardly refrain from taking down the timbrel from the wall, and bursting, like Miriam, into song. "*Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously! He hath dashed to pieces the enemy!*"

Constant information of what was occurring, every rumour, true or false, whether of victory or of failure, was brought to Hadassah by her son-in-law, Abishai, who little dreamed that every word which he uttered was overheard by the wounded Athenian, from whom he was divided but by the partitioning curtain!

In one of his visits to Hadassah, Abishai told how Judas had in the mountains raised a standard, which bore the inscription, "Who is like unto Thee among the gods, O Jehovah!"

"It is said," observed Abishai, "that from the initial letters of this inscription the word MACCABEUS is formed, and that by this new title Judas is commonly called; it is a name which the Syrians will soon have cause to dread."

"It is a well-chosen name!" cried Hadassah. "Let the Asmonean be called *Makke-baiah* (a conqueror in the Lord), for doubtless the God whom he serves will give to him the victory!"

The triumphant joy of the patriotic Hadassah received a painful check when she heard some time afterwards from Abishai of the grievous sacrifice of the lives of a thousand faithful Hebrews, who had taken refuge in a cave at no great distance from Jerusalem. Being attacked there on the Sabbath-day by the Syrians, these Hebrews had actually let themselves be slaughtered without resistance, rather than incur sin (as they thought) by breaking the Fourth Commandment! Grieved at this waste of precious life, it was a relief to Hadassah to learn that such a sacrifice to a mistaken sense of duty would not be repeated; for when the tidings had reached Mattathias and his sons, they had bitterly mourned for their slaughtered countrymen, and had said one to another, "If we all do as our brethren have done, and fight not for our lives and laws, against the heathen, they will quickly root us out of the earth." A decree, therefore, was sent forth from the camp in the mountains, that to Hebrews attacked on the Sabbath-day, self-defence was lawful and right.

In the meantime, under the care of Hadassah, the wounds of Lycidas were gradually healing. Never to any man had confinement and suffering been more sweetened, for was he not near to Zarah; did he not hear the soft music of her voice, breathe the same air, even see her light form gliding past the entrance of his hiding-place, though the maiden never entered it? The necessity of concealing the presence of Lycidas, above all from the blood-thirsty Abishai, compelled the closing during the daytime of the door at the back of the dwelling which opened on the small piece of ground behind. Peasants or travellers would occasionally, though rarely, come to fill their pitchers or slake their thirst at the little fountain gushing from the hill, and had the door of what Lycidas playfully called his "den" been open, there would have been nothing to prevent strangers from seeing or entering within. The whole ventilation of the confined space occupied by the invalid depended therefore during the day-time on its communication with the front room, which might be called the only public apartment, and in which not only food was now prepared and taken, and the occasional guest received, but in which the Hebrew ladies pursued their daily avocations. Here Zarah would pursue her homely occupation of spinning, and Hadassah copy out on rolls of vellum portions from the Law and the Prophets. This latter occupation was fraught with peril; and had Hadassah been discovered in the act of transcribing from the sacred pages, it might have cost her her life. Antiochus had eagerly sought to destroy all copies of the Scriptures, or to profane them by having vile pictures painted on the margins. To possess – far more to copy out – God's Holy Word was now a capital offence. But the faith of Hadassah

seemed to raise her above all personal fear; the peril connected with her pious labours made her but more earnestly pursue them. The presence of the young Gentile in her dwelling was a source of far greater uneasiness to the widow, than any danger which threatened herself.

Had Hadassah been able to seclude her patient entirely, she would willingly have discharged the duties of hospitality towards him; but such seclusion the scanty accommodation of her dwelling would have rendered impossible, even had Lycidas been willing to submit to perfect isolation. But this was by no means the case. Not only did he require the curtain frequently to be drawn back to enable him freely to breathe; but the Greek, as his strength increased, was eager to be seen as well as to see, and to speak as well as to listen. No anxious warnings of danger to be apprehended from the sudden entrance of Abishai could prevent Lycidas from dragging his languid limbs beyond the limits which the curtain defined, and joining in social converse. Lycidas resolutely shut his eyes to the fact that, to his hostess at least, his presence was unwelcome. He deceived himself into the belief that he was rather repaying the kindness which he had received, by lightening the dulness of the secluded lives led by the Hebrew ladies. The young Athenian drew forth for their amusement all the rich stores of his cultivated mind. Now he recited wondrous tales of other lands; now gave vivid descriptions of adventures of his own; poetry flowed spontaneously from his lips like a stream – now sparkling with fancy, now deepening into pathos; Lycidas had in Athens been compared to Apollo, as much for his mental gifts as his singular personal beauty.

To the brilliant conversation of the stranger, so unlike what she ever had heard before, Zarah listened with innocent pleasure. She was ever obedient to her aged relative, and often did Hadassah's bidding in the upper rooms of the dwelling, even when it seemed to the maiden that she was sent on needless errands; but the light form, in its simple blue garment, with the long linen veil thrown back from the graceful head, was always returning to the apartment, to which it was drawn by a new and powerful attraction. If Hadassah sometimes appeared irritable and imperious towards the fair young being whom she loved, it was because her mind was disturbed, her rest broken by anxieties which she could impart to no one. The aged lady scarcely knew which evil she most dreaded: the discovery of Lycidas by Abishai – a discovery which would inevitably stain her threshold with blood – or the long sojourn under her roof of the dangerous stranger, whom she had unwillingly admitted, and now more unwillingly retained in her home.

CHAPTER IX.

DEATH OF MATTATHIAS

Wild was the life led by Mattathias and his followers in the mountains – a life of danger and hardship; danger met manfully, hardship endured cheerfully. Amongst wild rocks, heaped together like the fragments of an elder world torn asunder by some fearful convulsion of Nature, the band of heroes found their home. Where the hyaena has its den, and the leopard its lair; where the timid wabber or coney hides in the stony clefts, there the Hebrews lurked in caves, and manned the gigantic fastnesses which no human hands had reared, and from which it would be no easy task for any enemy to dislodge them.

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