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THE SIGNET OF HIRAM:

A TALE OF THE FIRST TEMPLE.

1874.

MASONIC TIDINGS PUBLISHING HOUSE,
SUSPENSION BRIDGE, N. Y.

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INTRODUCTORY.

To the Craftsmen of the United States :

In getting up the series of publications of which this is the first number, I am actuated by a desire to popularize masonic literature of the lighter, as well as heavier class. As the outlines of the Masonry of King Solomon's times are vague and shadowy, I have chosen fiction as the best means of illustrating the condition of the craft at that period of the World's history. I leave to the reader the task of discerning traces of our fraternity in the story.

For a like reason I have taken the same medium for illustrating the condition of the craft at the time of the first introduction of Masonry in England, and in the third pamphlet I have taken the story teller's method of showing the benefits of membership in the Lodges at the present day.

The materials for the other proposed numbers of the Library of Cheap Masonic Publications have accumulated on my hands during an active connection with Masonic Newspapers extending over a period of nearly twenty years; that they will be found valuable and interesting by the brethren, I have no doubt.

Should my life be spared to carry out my plan, the whole series will form a Library at once cheap and comprehensive. The time of publication of each number will be announced on the cover of the one which precedes it, and the size of page and style of make-up will be kept the same as in this pamphlet, so that they can be bound into books of uniform size.

The great cost of getting together a Masonic Library has hitherto prevented brethren of moderate means from attempting to accomplish so desirable an end, and to such my present enterprise will be hailed as the right thing in the right time and place. It may not satisfy the hypercritical, but it is, at any rate, an attempt in the right direction.

Fraternally,

THE COMPILER.

THE SIGNET OF HIRAM.

A TALE OF THE FIRST TEMPLE.

CHAPTER I.

In the year of 1012, B. C., the ancient city of Jerusalem was in its glory. David, the Warrior Prince, had passed away, leaving his throne and a compact and powerful kingdom to his son Solomon. Peace reigned throughout Judea, commerce flourished, and the people worshipped the Most High God, according to his Divine command. For years David had been accumulating gold and silver and other materials to build a house for the Lord; the splendor and magnificence of which should far transcend that of the heathen temples among the surrounding nations. But his hands were red with blood; he had fought many battles; and because he was a man of blood the Lord God would not allow him to accomplish his design, and he died, leaving the building of the Temple as a sacred legacy to his son and successor, King Solomon. This wise King continued the compact entered into by his father with Hiram, King of Tyre, whose dominions extended over the Northern part of what is now known as Palestine, embracing the part of the Forest of Lebanon where the best

and tallest cedars grew. By a further compact between these two enlightened and honorable Princes, Hiram was to send his workmen into the forests of Lebanon, fell and prepare cedar trees, as many as should be required for the Temple, and convey them in floats to Joppa, whence the craftsmen of Solomon took them to Jerusalem. And the wages of Hiram's men were corn, wine, and oil. There seems, also, to have been a warm personal attachment between these two Kings, and of his own motion, it appears, Hiram of Tyre sent to Solomon, Hiram the widow's son, a workman of transcendent skill, whose mother was of the tribe of Dan, but whose father was a man of Tyre.

The workmen upon the Temple, and in the forests, were all classified and arranged by those three men into three divisions, Bearers of Burdens, Craftsmen, and Masters, each class having its peculiar means of recognizing each other by day or night. From the middle men or Craftsmen, were chosen overseers for the first class, the principal part of whose labors were in the forest and quarries. The spirit which animated King Solomon and his two friends, and the rulers of Israel, seems to have been generally diffused through all the thousands of workmen upon the sacred edifice. They knew that the plans for the Temple came from the Most High himself, and that they were instruments chosen to work out his will. They knew that the very site of the building was holy ground. There, on Mt. Moriah, was the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, where King David had met and appeased the destroying angel; and there too was the spot where occurred the memorable strife between the two

brothers, as to which should be most gracious and generous to the other in the division of the wheat they had jointly grown there. They knew, too, that so sacred was the edifice they were called upon to erect that no metal tool must profane it, its sacred chambers must not echo to the sound of ax or hammer. And so for several years they labored harmoniously together, the greatest contention between them being as to who best could work, and best agree. Strange indeed would it be, if among so many workmen there were not found, before the Temple was completed, some uneasy and ambitious or wicked spirits, whose conduct should mar the general harmony. Such were found—three of them in all, among whom was one more daring and wicked than the others, whose history we propose to trace in connection with that of other persons, in the chapters which follow.

Carrying our minds back nearly three thousand years, let us enter the forests of Lebanon. At this time, on the slope of a valley in the extreme northern district of Palestine, amid a group of ancient cedars, stood the abode of Asher, and Bith'iah, his wife. This worthy man was one of the overseers of the woodcutters, who were scattered through the forest, engaged in felling and preparing timbers for the great Temple at Jerusalem. The valley on whose slope their cottage stood, was fomed by two ridges connecting the higher ranges of the mountain with the plain, and which in modern times have received the name of the Spurs of Lebanon, and from which tributary tor-

rents, fed from the snowy summits, came rushing down to water the fields of Galilee. There was nothing remarkable about the cottage. It had stood there for four years, or ever since Asher had been, by order of the higher powers at Jerusalem, assigned to the post of overseer of the woodcutters in that vicinity. The vine and the fig trellised over the doorway, and interwoven with the rose and the hyssop, spread a grateful shade. On the flat roof, bundles of flax spread in order told of the industry of Bithiah, and on the cedar lintels and door-posts could be seen traces of portions of the Mosaic law, which had been carved upon them. Through the garden flowed a small stream of pure water, bordered with the lilies and anemones; rocks partially covered with the almond, the citron and pine formed the barriers of the garden, and to the right, rose high over all the snow-clad summits of Hermon. Two children gladdened this forest home, a boy of fourteen and a girl of twelve years of age. The boy, Elam by name, had a bland and open countenance, with the distinctive features which mark the Hebrew race. He was bronzed by the Eastern sun, and over his shoulders hung masses of glossy jet hair, while eyes of unusual brilliancy sparkled beneath an ample forehead and spoke of that gentleness which is not incompatible with the higher attributes of manhood. His sister, Rachel, was of more delicate mould, but possessed of a beauty by no means rare among the daughters of Israel. The brother and sister were warmly attached to each other, and Elam made it his pleasure to conform his tastes and amusements to those of his sister. She in turn delighted to share in

her brother's care of their flocks and herds, and when they were folded for the night, their greatest pleasure was to sit in the cottage garden and watch for their father's return from his labors in the forest.

On the evening upon which our narrative begins, towards the close of summer, at the end of the Jewish month Elul, Rachel had been seated for two long hours on the knoll by the side of the garden stream, looking anxiously for her father's return. She was all the more eager to welcome him as Elam had gone two days before to a little distance on a visit, and was not expected back until the following day. Long ere this hour of the day her father had been wont to appear to the loving watcher, as eager for her welcome as she was to give it. But in vain now did the girl look for his long drawn shadow flitting through the trees, or listen to catch the notes of some favorite Hebrew melody, with which the wood-cutter was wont to beguile the distance, or give intimation of his approach. Nothing could she hear but the murmur of the soft gliding rivulet, or the hum of the mountain-bee winging its way back for the night, laden with spoil, to some cleft in the rocks which all around were supplied with wild honey. Slowly the sun sunk to rest among the rosy clouds of the west; twilight merged into night, and Rachel took refuge from the falling dew within the cottage.

"Where can father be?" said the girl, looking wistfully with her bright black eyes into her mother's face, who also was beginning to feel surprised at the unusual delay.

"Something, my child, must have detained him on the

mountains; but the God of our father is with him—even the Keeper of Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps.”

“Surely no evil can have befallen him,” continued Rachel. “I know I should not think of such things; but I cannot help it.”

“Be patient my child,” said the mother, “thou knowest that it is on the eve of the passover, and of thy father’s desire to be in readiness with Elam for the holy feast. This may have led him to encroach on the first watch, to-night; that his work for the week may be the sooner completed.”

“But could he not have missed his way,” pursued Rachel, her mind still on the thought of danger.

“No, surely not, child, with such a moon as that to guide him,” replied her mother—a bright gleam at that moment bursting from behind a cloud and lighting up the cottage.

“Or, worse still,” continued the little Jewess, as fresh reasons for disquietude occurred to her—“may he not have suffered from the great heat? The sun’s rays may have struck him down, as they threatened to do last year; and then, dear mother, what would become of us?”

“Hush! hush, my child! do not make thyself and me unhappy. He is in better hands than ours. The stars in their courses fought against Sisera; but,” she added, to herself, “a wife and mother in Israel will take comfort in the word of Him who saith; ‘The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.’”

Rachel, still foreboding, was about to reply, when her mother, affectionately embracing her, prevailed on her to

retire to rest, with the promise of an early waking, when her father himself would be the first at her bedside, to explain the cause of the delay.

Bithiah busied herself with household cares, making ready to welcome her husband when he should come. At first she would not allow herself to feel that there was any cause for alarm. As hour after hour passed, however, her fears began to increase, and would not be dismissed at her bidding. Again and again she unbarred the door and listened for the wished-for footfall; but no sound disturbed the quiet scene. The moon lighted up the valley with her silvery radiance, and the only signs of motion were the ripples of sparkling light which her beams cast on the stream below. Had Elam been with her, his presence would have served, in some degree, to allay her misgivings. As it often happens when the mind is unstrung, painful apprehensions were beginning to mingle with other and more likely reasons for his detention. Could Rachel’s surmise be correct? Had he lost his way? Did she not recently hear him speak of the number of fierce wolves which he had seen in the highest ranges of Lebanon? But then she consoled herself with the remembrance that he was not alone. His companions, some of them, lived on his route homeward, some distance from the locality where they were at labor. So, replenishing her lamp, she resolved to wait as patiently as she could until day-dawn, trusting ere then to have her fears relieved, and be able to fulfill her promise to Rachel, who, locked in slumber’s gentle embrace, was all unconscious of the anxieties which were not soon to be allayed.

CHAPTER II.

The valley, upon the slope of which stood the cottage of Asher and Bithiah, was called the valley of Abdol. At its extremity, and about half a league from the cottage was one of the few other dwellings in that remote and secluded part of Lebanon. It was the abode of two brothers. The elder was the intimate friend and companion of Asher. Ever since the levies had been sent into the forest by the command of King Solomon they had been associated as hewers of wood on the mountain. In no way related by blood, their minds seemed to have been cast in the same mould. Both were by nature full of the warmth and generosity of noble affections. To these natural graces were added another charm. They were twinned in religious faith, knelt at the same altar, and worshiped the same God—the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. Together they toiled, and their voices frequently joined in chanting those sublime strains which have since thrilled on the lips of thousands of every tongue and clime, and which were then, comparatively, fresh from the inspired Harp of the Royal Bard of Judah. Jobal, was this elder brother's name, and it would have been well for him and others, and

have brightened an otherwise checkered existence, if his brother, who shared with him his pastoral home, had also partaken of his lofty qualities of heart. But Jahaz had a nature directly the reverse of his brother's. Of a dark and sinister countenance, he was morose and selfish, ever grasping at what he could not attain, and longing for what could not be his. This difference between them was a source of pain to the amiable Jobal, who made it his study and interest to accommodate himself to the less pliable and forgiving temper of his brother. For a while they had worked together with Asher in the mountains, but Jahaz had, for some time been engaged in cultivating the Olive grounds around their cottage, and herding the flocks and cattle which formed the principal part of their possessions. Their family was of Jewish descent, but they were Tyrians by birth, and while Jobal embraced with ardor the Jewish faith, which formed such a strong bond between him and his bosom friend, Asher, Jahaz sullenly clung to the superstitions which had been taught him in his boyhood. And this religious difference was one of the many sources of trouble between the brothers, and out of it grew Jahaz's hatred, bitter, and inveterate, to Asher. On one occasion, while they labored together in the forest, Jahaz taunted his brother with having apostatized from the faith of his nation.

"Nay, brother," said Jobal, "if there be any apostasy, it is thou who art the apostate. Our ancestors were of Judea and worshipped the living God."

And then Asher interfered, with some warmth, defend-

ing the faith of the Jews, and speaking with pity of the ignorance of the nations which knew not God. "And said he in conclusion, "It seems to me passing strange that thou who hast wrought on the Sacred Temple, and received a craftsman's wages, should yet grovel in the darkness of heathenism."

"Jew, who made thee a judge over me," answered Jahaz, hotly. "What were the promises to the craftsmen when we were engaged for this work? Have we received any part of that for which we wrought save the miserable pittance of corn, wine, and oil?"

"Nay, nay, brother," said Jobal, "the Master will perform his promise, when the Temple is completed. Surely, Hiram of Tyre never yet violated his word. For myself, if the promise be not fulfilled, still I shall rejoice that I joined the bands of Temple workmen, since by coming here, thanks to thee, brother Asher, I have attained to a knowledge of the true and living God."

"Methinks," said Asher, "brother Jahaz has little confidence in the word of his august countryman; has he as little in the Prince of Israel, our great King Solomon? Think'st thou, brother, that he would allow any injustice to those who are faithful to the end?"

"What boots it to thee," angrily retorted Jahaz, "what my thoughts or my opinions are? And who is your King that I should care aught for him? Thou hast won from me the heart of my brother, wilt thou now make me thy slave? I tell thee, had I the power, the whole craft should assemble at Jerusalem at once and unitedly de-

mand of those haughty rulers the fulfillment of some part of the promises of Hiram of Tyre."

Asher and Jobal were shocked at the insubordination and violence of Jahaz, and the former rebuked him sharply for the evil example he had set to the workmen, who had gathered around him. Soon after this scene, the turbulent fellow was removed from the work through the influence of Asher, as overseer, who felt that serious trouble with the workmen might grow out of his presence among them. And so, with increasing bitterness towards Asher in his heart, Jahaz went back to the cottage, and began to till the ground and watch the flocks owned by himself and brother, in which occupation we found him. Asher bore the enmity of Jahaz with patient and dignified silence, and the friendship between him and Jobal continued as warm and abiding as ever, notwithstanding, approaching in romantic devotion the attachment of David and Jonathan. To make the ties still stronger between them, the son of Jobal, a dying legacy of the dearly beloved wife of his early manhood—a noble and brave youth of fifteen, conceived a boyish attachment for the gentle Rachel, and the two were early betrothed by their parents, after the manner of those times.

And now let us go back and take up the thread of our narrative, which we left at the close of our second chapter. In the afternoon of the day when Asher, as we have seen, was so anxiously expected, himself and his friend Jobal had been engaged as usual, on one of the upper ridges of Lebanon, cutting down cedar trees and preparing them for transportation to Joppa. The ringing sound of other

axes than theirs showed that other workmen, not far off, were similarly occupied. The monotonous strokes were now and then varied by a crashing noise, which told that some ancient denizen of the forest had bowed to the inexorable decree of destiny, and fallen prone upon the earth, from whose bosom it sprang.

"Another score of such, brother," said Jobal to his companion, "and we shall be ready for our journey. Verily, I envy thy trusty young Elam his first pilgrimage."

"May our father's God prosper him!" replied Asher; "thou mayest well believe he can talk of but little else. For weeks the sacred words have been on his sister's lips, and on his own: 'I was glad when they said unto me, let us go into the house of the Lord; our feet shall stand within thy gates, O, Jerusalem.' Though it be a father's testimony, I shall gladly make the heart of so dutiful a boy happy."

"The blessing of the God of Jacob go with you both," said Jobal, "may he gladden you in your journey and fulfill all his promises to those you leave unprotected behind."

"Amen," said Asher, reverently: "I have never yet returned from the festival, but I have found a blessing. Never was my flock, during my absence, diminished, nor did the footsteps of plunderers invade my dwelling."

"Art thou all in readiness?" said Jobal.

"Elam has gone to Laish, to get the necessities requisite for the way. To-morrow I expect him back, and seven days hence, by the will of God, we shall proceed on our pilgrimage."

From this conversation the reader will easily guess that the great Jewish feast of the Passover was about to take place at Jerusalem. At this feast, according to the Mosaic law, all the males of Judea were wont to repair to the Holy City. Often they started on the journey several weeks before the time for the celebration, pursuing their way leisurly, by the clear light of the Moon at night, in order to avoid the heat of the sun, which at that season of the year is intense. They cheered each other as they journeyed, by singing or chanting the songs of David and Solomon, many of which were peculiarly appropriate to the sacred occasion. We can well imagine that, to the genuine Israelite, these festivals were seasons of especial gladness, and that more especially would they be so to youths like Elam, who were for the first time to be introduced to scenes with which they had been familiar, by hearsay, from earliest childhood. But we digress.

The two woodcutters were proceeding vigorously with their labors. They had felled four noble giants of Lebanon since morning, and several others of equal dimensions, hard by, were marked to follow. Jobal was busily cleaning off some of the lower branches of the next cedar marked to fall, and Asher was close behind him, making the great trunk of another vibrate to his vigorous strokes. Suddenly his ax glanced and struck his comrade full in the temple, and Jobal fell, with a deep, heavy groan, his face pale and convulsed, and the red blood trickling fast from the ghastly wound.

"Jobal, Jobal!" exclaimed Asher, in a voice of agony, "can it be—" but his voice choked—he could say no more.

A stifled groan answered him. He quickly brought a flagon of water from the adjacent brook, and mingling wine with it from a leathern bottle lying on the grass at his side, applied it to the other's palid lips. But all signs of consciousness were gone. "God of my fathers," cried the poor man afresh in his anguish, "in thy great mercy forbid that these innocent hands should be stained with the blood of my best and kindest friend!"

But Asher quickly realized that there was no time for unavailing sorrow, and hastened to call assistance from his nearest comrades. Soon a saddened group were gathered around, spectators of the mournful scene. Human aid was of no avail. The dying man became conscious for a moment, and had just enough strength to grasp his friend's hand and mutter in his ear some words, too broken for the others to comprehend, when his eyes closed to open no more, and the strong man of but a moment before was stretched out lifeless on the turf. Again and again did Asher cast himself on the ground, with his face towards Jerusalem, and pray that Jehovah in his mercy, would yet restore the Spirit which had fled, but all in vain. The workmen formed a rude pallet of cedar branches, and laying the body thereon, with the face covered, the sorrowing procession set out in the direction of the dead man's home. The woodcutter's thoughts had, till now, been solely occupied with the fate of his bosom friend. But the first flush of anguish was over, and now there came to his memory those last stammered utterances reminding him that Jahaz now stood towards him in the relation of the Avenger of Blood. The expiring breath of friendship

had warned him to flee to the nearest city of Refuge, so mercifully provided by the Masonic law. From the vindictive Jahaz there was no hope of mercy. Yet how could he flee? How separate himself from the faithful Bithiah and his loving children? But life was at stake, and better were years of captivity than a horrible death, the widowhood of his wife and the orphanage of children, dearer to him than life itself. And might not the longest hours of captivity be lightened by the thought that, possibly, he might yet return once more to the hearth and home of his affections? The Jubilee Year would come, as the wheels of time moved onward in their ceaseless round.

The shades of night fell long ere they reached the neighborhood of Jobal's cottage. After venturing as far as he thought safe, Asher lingered a little behind the mourners, and availing himself of an opening in the wood, made his way by the aid of the starlight and his own knowledge of the winding paths, as fast as he could up the valley to his own cottage. Many and sad were the thoughts which crossed his mind in that lone midnight journey. He had left his family in the morning happy and joyous; he was returning to bid them a sad farewell. His hand, although it was by a painful accident, was stained with a brother's blood, and with the vengeful kinsman of the slain, the voice of that brother's blood would cry loudly against him. Yet he knew that an Almighty Protector was over all, and to him he could confidently commit his wife and children.

The painful anxiety of Bithiah was broken in upon towards morning, by a gentle tapping at the lattice, accom-

panied by a voice: "The Lord be with thee. Undo the latch. It is I. I have but a moment." Strangely agitated as it was, and unlike her husband's joyous tones, she recognized the voice, and his call was speedily answered.

"What evil has befallen thee," exclaimed Bithiah, as her eager gaze fell upon his pale features and quivering lips.

"I cannot tell," he said in broken words, "I cannot tell all the sad truth. I must be within the gates of Kedesh before the sun again sets. It was the deed of an innocent hand, but it has brought upon me long sought vengeance." Hurrying to the mattress upon which Rachel slept, he pressed a kiss upon her forehead, and turning aside, he gave way to a new burst of grief. "Elain, noble boy, child of my hopes and prayers, would thou had'st been here this night to share thy father's blessing. But Jehovah's will be done! To-morrow I will think of thee at thy mother's side. Be thy name as that of 'Noah' to 'comfort' her. Then putting on a change of clean raiment, and providing himself with such necessities as the agitation of the moment would admit, "I have no time for more," he said, "for see yonder light through the lattice, moving quickly up the valley. They are at hand. I knew he would not tarry. Farewell! Farewell! The Lord God will be thy sun and thy shield!" So saying, he plunged into the forest. The moon was obscured by clouds, and this, added to the intricacies of the wood, perplexed him about finding his way, at first, but ere

long the morning dawned over the distant mountains. Then he brushed quickly through the dew-drops on the long grass about his feet, and by the time the sun was up he had gained the beaten road.

Scarce half an hour had elapsed since the hurried departure of Asher, ere the noise of deep voices was heard outside the cottage door. Too well she had guessed out the tragical story which her husband's agitation had permitted him to but partly disclose, and knowing the Jewish law, she divined her husband's imminent peril.

"In the name of the great Lawgiver," exclaimed a hoarse voice, "I demand entrance. Delay not, lest these lintels be at once splintered. The voice of my brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

"Fear not these rude threats," said a milder tone; "thou art safe, and no hair of thy head shall be harmed. Open unto us, who are thy friends."

The company of woodcutters had followed closely upon the heels of Jahaz, fearing that he might do violence to the unprotected family.

"Have mercy! Have mercy!" exclaimed the poor woman, as she undid the latch and flung herself at the avenger's feet. "How can'st thou slay the only protector of my innocent children?"

"There is no mercy for the murderer," replied Jahaz. "Wherever he lurks bring him forth. Mock me no longer with delay. Is he within? Speak?"

"If say I must," said Bithiah, "I will tell the truth in the name of my father's God. He is not here, and—"

"To Kedesh!" thundered Jahaz. "Amen," responded

the weeping wife, "and may our God defend him, even as he defended Jacob from the wrath of Esau."

The rest of the party remained to comfort the stricken mother in Israel until day dawned, but Jahaz, the Avenger, plunged into the forest glade in the direction of the City of Refuge.

In the North of Galilee, far from any frequented highway, ran a road which led through a valley overhung with cedars and sycamores. On the craggy slopes above, shepherds were feeding their flocks, and the music of their reeds floated softly down into the valley on the quiet air of the early morning. No other sound was heard save that made by the bounding of some light-footed gazelle as it descended the steep slope to slake its thirst at the brook. Along this road, a man arrayed in a white tunic, gathered to his waist by a leathern girdle, was seen running in breathless haste. A shepherd, observing him in the distance, left his fleecy charge and clambered down the steep to inquire the stranger's alarm. But the wayfarer, Asher of Abdol, barely waved his hand, to give intimation that he could not be delayed on his errand. Drops stood on his brow; his tongue was parched, and he cast longing glances at the streamlets which furrowed the slopes here and there, and at the purple wild grapes which hung in profusion from the vines which in wild luxuriance clambered up the steep rocks. On he rushed, for life depended on his haste. Through the valley the trees sheltered him, but ere long his road again led up the barren mountain, and the sun's rays beat upon

him fiercely. Anon he had arrived where two roads met; by a bridge across the rivulet whose course he had been following. Panting and exhausted, he stopped to consider his one continuing directly on, and the other leading directly course. He had not long to pause, for straight before him, as he turned to the right, was a post, and on its top a sign board with the word "REFUGE," and a finger pointing towards Kedesh. In an instant the bridge was crossed, and, faint and weary, he hurried up the slope. Might he not slacken his pace? Might it not be that he was mistaken in his apprehensions of pursuit by the Avenger? No! for as he paused the sound of fleeter steps than his own smote his ear, crossing the bridge over the brook. There were but a few stone-casts between him and death. Hastily re-adjusting his sandals, and moistening his parched lips with water from a scanty pool at the spot, he sprang upon his way. Ordinarily, he was more than a match for his pursuer, but now mental and bodily fatigue had told upon his powers of muscle, and the vindictive Jahaz was slowly gaining on him. As he attained the hill the sight which met his eyes gave him fresh courage. Before him stretched the beautiful plain of Zaanain, and to his right rose the lofty hill of Naphtali, on one of the lower of ridges of which glittered in the sunbeams the walls of Kedesh. His road conducted straight to a cluster of lofty palm trees, such as generally mark the gate of Jewish cities. It was a moment of thrilling trepidation. Life and death were quivering in the balance. If through faintness or exhaustion his limbs failed him, no power on earth could save him. The rapid tread of the Avenger be-

hind him echoed in his ears, and by the roadside heaps of stones, now and then, told where unfortunate manslaughterers had been overtaken and slain. On he pressed, and at the last, he sank down fainting, inside the massive gate, which at once closed on its hinges, and forbade the entrance of the baffled pursuer.

The anger of Jahaz had no bounds. Cursing with the little breath he had left, he flung himself on the ground, and threw from him the weapon he had concealed in his tunic, and with which he had hoped to reach the heart of his intended victim.

No sooner was Asher within the gates of the city than he was surrounded by a crowd of people, curious to see the refugee. Soon a Levite came, and supported by him the weary man was taken to a cool and well-aired chamber near the gate. Here they took off his sandals, washed his weary feet, gave him some scanty refreshments, and left him to seek the repose so needed by his exhausted frame.

Early next morning the seven judges were convened in the Hall of Justice. Jahaz was there, haggard and pale, yet with the fire of hate still burning in his eye. Soon Asher was led in between two officers, and took his place in the farther end of the hall. His white tunic had been exchanged for a long thread-bare garment, his beard had been shorn, his hair was dishevelled, and his head covered with dust. Scarce had he made obeisance to his judges when a fresh shower of dust was cast at him by Jahaz—the usual mode by which the Avenger expressed the nature of his accusation. As Asher glanced, with a dis-

turbed look, about him, he observed among the judges the venerable form of Gideon of Zaphar, an aged prophet and patriarch in Israel, and one who was much beloved by all who knew him. Though not one of the judges, yet for his wisdom and sanctity he was often with them to give counsel. The time for the trial came, and the vengeful Jahaz preferred a charge of malice against the manslaughterer, and that the deed of blood had been long meditated, and was at last affected in the silence and secrecy of the forest, in fancied security from the hand of justice. Calmly and manfully did Asher repel the charge, and stated fully the particulars of the accident, adding, with tearful eyes and quivering lips, that most gladly would he exchange places with his dead friend. But by the Jewish law this was of no avail—his enemy's tale was just as plausible as his own. He must have witnesses to corroborate his story. His position was indeed perilous. But at this juncture Gideon of Zaphar intervened, and succeeded in obtaining from the judges a stay of proceedings for a week, that testimony from the wood-cutters of Lebanon might be obtained. It was unnecessary, however, for by this time the noise of footsteps was heard without the door, and the trusty companions of Asher, in the mournful night march from the heights of Lebanon to the valley of Abdol, were ushered in. The face of the almost condemned man was lighted up with joy at the appearance of his faithful friends. Their testimony was positive, and he was adjudged entitled to the protection of the city of Refuge, and assigned a suitable abode. He had time for but a few words with his old comrades,

but they brought news of his family, and carried back to his cottage home in Abdol his blessing.

Asher was now the tenant of a small chamber, to which he had been conducted by the officers of the gate. Years of captivity were in prospect for him. His family must remain apart from him, too, for by the Jewish law if they removed their residence to Kedesh they thereby forfeited the paternal inheritance, and relinquished the sepulchre of their forefathers. From a freeman, breathing the balmy air of Lebanon, he was now cooped up in a single apartment in one of the narrow streets of a refuge city. All was in strange contrast with his pleasant cottage home at Abdol, and, the excitement and uncertainty of the trial being over, his thoughts reverted to his changed circumstances, and a dismal feeling of homesickness came over him. While indulging in a train of gloomy thoughts, a knock was heard at his door. He bade the comer enter, and in a moment Gideon of Zaphar stood before him. The old man had come to comfort him, and volunteered to make a pilgrimage to Abdol and bring the unfortunate Asher news of the loved ones so hurriedly left behind him. Kedesh was the principal residence of old Gideon, but he was accustomed to make journies from place to place in Galilee, and was warmly welcomed wherever he chose to stop, and "Gideon's chamber," became a household word in the dwelling of many a pious Jew.

"Is it altogether impossible to appease the avenger," asked Asher of the old prophet, "and purchase my release from this sanctuary city by a money-ransom?"

"Impossible—utterly impossible," said old Gideon. "This aged voice has pleaded successfully for many things, but for this I dare not plead. If thou takest the advice of an old Israelite, dream not of escape, or attempt in any way to evade the law. There is nothing for thee but patient submission to the will of the Lord."

"Amen," replied Asher, "the will of God be done! Thy servant should have known better than to have thought of such a thing."

"Here is my copy of our holy law," said the other, presenting him with a well-worn scroll. Take it as a pledge of affection from one who knew thy father before thee. Mine own eyes will soon be too dim to read it; let it be handed down to thy children as a remembrance of old Gideon of Zaphar. In a few weeks I must fulfill a promised mission to the mountains of Galilee, and then I shall bend my way to thy home. Leave me to my own time and leisure, and indulge in no anxiety about my return. It may be months ere I again cross thy threshold; but I commend thee to the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob."

So saying the aged prophet closed behind him the door of Asher's apartment, and left him with a heart swelling with gratitude.

We must hasten over this portion of our narrative, or our tale will be spun out to an unwarranted length. Suffice it to say, that Gideon of Zaphar performed the mission he promised to undertake, and in due time crossed the threshold of the afflicted cottagers at Abdol. At the end of the month Bul—our October—he again stood in

the presence of Asher. To the latter's anxious inquiries, old Gideon said :

"All is well, my son. At least I bring thee no heavy tidings. The God of Israel has spread his shield of protection over those thou lovest. Thy household survives the rude shock which severed them in one night from husband and father; but I will make known to thee all the truth."

"Keep nothing back from me."

"There is nothing in what I am to tell thee but what might have been expected. That terrible night was too much for the tender spirit and fragile body of the mother of thy children. It is no mortal ailment, but her eyes are no longer gladdened by the light of day. So extreme has been her bodily weakness that for some time she has been unable to go without help to her favorite seat under the willow tree."

Tears filled the eyes of Asher. "Ah, that seat," said he, "it is where she was wont to sit and watch my evening return; but woe is me!—And, how are the children?"

"Two precious young olive plants," said the old man; "these are their remembrances;" and he opened his wallet and put into Asher's hands a few dried plants and forest-flowers. The simplicity of the memorial caused a fresh gush of tears.

"Be comforted, my son. I have ere long promised to return to thy Lebanon home with tidings of how it fares with thee."

"The will of the Lord be done," said Asher. "And though we meet no more on earth, nothing can forbid an everlasting union in a better world!"

And so they parted again.

CHAPTER III.

Let us again revert to the fatal accident on Mt. Lebanon.

The household of the slain Jobal consisted of but three persons besides himself—his brother Jahaz, an elderly Jewess who cared for the domestic arrangements, and his young daughter, Nain. We will not attempt to describe the grief and woe which settled on the orphan girl when she realized the extent of the calamity which had fallen upon her in the death of her idolized father. She sat for a time in stony grief, swaying to and fro, her hair dishevelled, her eyes dry, and tearless, and her ashen lips murmuring in broken accents, "My father! alas! my father." In vain her foster mother endeavored to console her. Her ears were deaf to the voice of affectionate condolence, and the words of tender faith in Jehovah, the father of the fatherless, failed to reach the fountains of her sorrow. So she sat and mourned through the long night of darkness, nor did the blessed sunlight as the next morning it smiled sweetly down into the green Valley of Abdol, dissipate the dark cloud which enveloped her spirit. But when she had looked her last upon the pale, serene face of the dead, and Jobal had been lain in the tomb of his fathers with all the solemnities of a Jewish burial, tears, blessed tears, came to her relief, and the tender tones of the aged handmaid who had cared for her from her earliest infancy, penetrated to her heart, and saddened, sorrowful and

weary, she came back and patiently took up the heavy burden which had been laid upon her young life. She noted the absence of her uncle, and, not divining its cause, asked of his whereabouts. A few words sufficed to bring to her mind the Mosaic law of homicide, for her father had been careful to instruct her in the sacred writings. She knew in her heart that Asher had not willingly slain her dear father, and too well she knew her uncle's enmity to that unfortunate man, and with what vindictiveness Jahaz would seek, under cover of the law, his bloody death. With her grief for the slain was mingled a tender fear for the father of her affianced, and on the day of Elam's return from Laish, unable to control her desire to see and comfort Bithiah and Rachel, and learn of the fate of Asher, she started up the valley towards the cottage.

She had gone but a short distance from her own home when she met the youth, Elam, who, unable to bear the thought that she might believe his father a willing murderer, had determined to see her, explain the sad affair, and, if possible, minister to the sorrow which he knew would encompass her. The meeting was tender and tearful, and we will not invade the privacy of their mutual grief and explanations. To Nain, the youth Elam communicated the project he had formed of visiting Jerusalem and seeking an audience with King Solomon. It seemed to him that if the King could be informed of the facts of the case, he would at once throw over his faithful craftsman the shield of his power, and restore him safely to his afflicted family. He knew that his father had safe-

ly gained the gates of Kedesh, for the faithful brethren of Asher, who had hastened to his aid at the trial in the chamber of the Judges at the gate, did not rest until they had communicated the result of that trial to the weeping wife and children of their friend.

"Art thou sure," said Nain, with a look and tone of tender solicitude, "that the journey can be safely accomplished? Thou mayest even meet with my uncle, who, in the bitterness of his anger, may do thee harm."

"Nay," replied the youth, "the law will not let his vengeance fall on me. Besides," he added reverently, "the God of my fathers and of thine will protect me. In him will I put my trust, for he is a strong and sure defence in every time of need."

"Thou sayest well," said Nain, "but who will care for those who abide at home, while thou art gone? The journey is long as well as dangerous."

"Can I not trust them also to Him who is mighty to save? Our brethren in the forest will also minister to them by turns, for they are all of the household of the faithful."

For a few moments the maiden seemed lost in thought and then she spoke again:

"Thou knowest that we of our house were once of Tyre. I have heard my father speak of one Hiram, a Tyrian, who is over the workmen at Jerusalem, and whose mother is Deborah, of Geshur. There was a bond between them, but I feel sure that, as thou art bent on this journey, thy footsteps had better turn aside for her dwelling on thy way. Mayhaps she will give thee a remembrance to her son."

"That is well thought of," said Elam. "It can do no harm, and I have learned that Hiram is all powerful with our great and wise King. I will even do as thou sayest."

In such converse as this they passed an hour, the great sorrow which had fallen upon their hearts keeping out all thought of themselves and their relations to each other, and then they retraced their steps. Elam's mother was next made acquainted with his project, and although her knowledge of the laws and customs of her people forbade any sanguine expectation of anything being accomplished thereby, yet her tender solicitude for her husband forbade her discouraging the trial. And so his arrangements for the journey were made with all possibly celerity.

We must now trace the history of the avenger for a little way, ere we visit old Deborah, and go up with the tribes to the feast of the Passover at Jerusalem. With a cloudy brow, and a glare of malignance at the victim who so narrowly escaped his avenging arm, Jahaz left the judgment room of Kedish on the acquittal of Asher. As he left the city gate, dark thoughts filled his mind, and he shook the dust from his feet and pronounced a bitter curse against it, and against the Jewish law which had stepped, as it were, between himself and his revenge. Slowly he plodded his way back to Abdol, and arrived at the cottage ere Nain had returned from her interview with Elam. Learning the direction she had taken, he suspected her intent, and, angry at the thought of her friendship to the family of Asher, determined to follow her.

Eagerly pursuing the winding path up the valley, he soon neared the spot where they had met, and ere he had quite reached it he heard the murmur of voices. His suspicious nature caused him to turn aside from the path and stealthily approach the parties holding converse, that he might listen to what they had to say. His rage was scarcely held in bounds when he observed the son of Asher and the daughter of his brother seated side by side on the grass, and holding close converse. "So, so," he muttered to himself, "the wolf's cub is early in pursuit of the roe. Methinks the maid is not an unwilling listener, either. I may gain knowledge by an attentive ear."

So saying he softly drew near them, screened from observation by the intervening shrubbery which skirted the path. As he came within earshot, he heard their conversation in regard to Elam's proposed visit to Jerusalem. Upon the instant he resolved to go up to the feast himself, and dog the youth's footsteps. He had a project of his own, too, which he had long revolved in his mind, and which could only be worked out at Jerusalem. His anger had been kindled against Hiram of Tyre, the Master Builder, because he had removed him from among the workmen in the forest of Lebanon at the request of Asher. He had now no hope of obtaining the secrets promised by Hiram to those Craftsmen who should faithfully labor on the Temple until its completion and dedication, unless they could be secured by stratagem. Could he once come into possession of those secrets, he could watch his opportunity to wreak his vengeance on Asher, and, fleeing to some foreign land, be enabled to make use of them for his own selfish ends.

Meditating in this wise, he suffered Elam and Nain to depart without perceiving him, and, full of his new purpose, he slowly returned to the cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

Time passed on, and once more the genial Spring time came, and the rocky heights of Lebanon, which had been crested with snow, were carpeted over with flowers and grass. The woodbine and the anemone put forth their leaves, and the scent of a thousand blossoms loaded the air and mingled their sweet fragrance with the odorous breath of the cedar and the pine. The Passover, the great feast of the Jewish people, took place about the middle of the month Nisan, our April. Elam had wrung a reluctant consent from his mother to his project of seeking an audience with the King, and had taken his staff and scrip and departed on his journey.

Towards the close of one of Spring's balmy days, just when the valleys were dressed in their freshest and loveliest garb of green, and the craggy ranges of Northern Palestine had also donned their vernal robes, old Gideon of Zaphar wended his way to the cottage home at Abdol. Young Rachel gave a cry of delight as his venerable form came to view, and hastened to meet him. The smitten Bithiah partly arose to her feet as she heard the sound of his voice, but with a sigh at the sudden remembrance of her infirmity, she sank back again into her seat. She

was now totally blind, and her mind, in spite of her efforts to the contrary, constantly brooded upon the sudden misfortune which had befallen her once happy household. The visit of old Gideon was indeed opportune and welcome, for not only could he give them news of the constant object of their thoughts, but now the aged prophet was their most affectionate and valued friend. He found Bithiah with her distaff still by her side, although she was unable to use it. Her features had a settled cast of sadness, mingled with meekness and resignation. She was greatly cheered and comforted by the news from Asher, and after communicating it, old Gideon asked:

"And where is Elam? I see him not."

"He is well, I trust," answered Bithiah, "but didst thou not meet him? It is but a few days since he left for Kédesh, to see his father before the celebration of the Passover at Jerusalem; I trust nothing has befallen him."

"He is, doubtless, safe in the refuge-city, ere this," returned Gideon. "I have not come directly hither, but tarried on my way in many of the dwellings of Israel."

"The boy was to visit," said Bithiah, "on the way, Deborah of Geshur, but whether he will tarry there in going or returning, I know not. It is three years since I have heard of her welfare, and I willingly gratified my Elam's wish to spend a few days under her roof."

"A few months ago," said Gideon, "I crossed her threshold, and gave and received a blessing. She and myself are now left alone, the representatives of a by-gone generation. Her illustrious son, the Master Builder at the Temple, does honor to so pure hearted a mother in Israel."

In converse like this the hours passed away, and on the morrow Gideon of Zaphar took his departure for the homes of other friends in the mountain range.

Deborah of Geshur had, in early life, married a celebrated artificer of Tyre. Their only son, Hiram, or Hiram, followed his father's trade, and when the latter died, he had, although quite young, given evidence of great skill and cunning. His special delight was in ornamental work, and to such excellence did he attain that he attracted the attention of the King of Tyre. And when desired by his royal ally to send up to Jerusalem a cunning workman, remembering that he was of Jewish extraction, and that his skill was unequalled by any in the realm, the King sent Hiram up to the holy city. His mother, Deborah, had no taste for courts, or the pomp and circumstances attending them. And so she chose to make her home among the friends of her early youth, and spend her declining years there, and be laid to rest in the sepulchre of her fathers. Towards her residence Elam took his way, as with scrip slung from his shoulders, and staff in hand, he left the threshold of his dwelling with his sister's kiss and his mother's blessing. He had resolved, in his own mind, to go there first of all, then to Jerusalem, and, on his return to Kadesh, hoping to bear with him to the latter place, an order for his father's release, from the hand of King Solomon. At the close of the same day, after leaving Abdo, dusty and tired from his unwonted journey, the youth reached the little village of Naphtali, where Deborah resided. Due enquiry enabled him to find her dwelling readily. It was pleasantly situated among a

cluster of palm trees, under the ample shade of which a number of Israelitish women, with veiled faces and pitchers in hand for drawing water, were resting in the shade from the fast sinking sun. The cottage in which Deborah lived was flat roofed, and constructed partly of timber and unhewn stone, with a luxuriant jasmine covering the rustic lintels, and a garden, of not very large dimensions, surrounding it. As he crossed the threshold, Deborah of Geshur warmly greeted him, and the young man bowed his head and received her blessing. She was a picturesque specimen of a true mother in Israel. I seem to see her now as I write; her conical head-dress of white linen, her long loose gown of course blue, girded to her waist by a girdle of Tyrian purple, her tall and almost masculine form now bending under the weight of increasing years, and her pilgrim staff in her hand, all together set off to advantage a countenance in which features of far more than ordinary intelligence and power lurk behind the furrows of age. Everything within the house betokened a generous competence, and the walls were adorned with numerous specimens of the early handcraft of her gifted son. There were models of Tyrian vessels and urns, rich carvings in oak and cedar and shittim wood, and curious designs in silver and gold and brass.

Deborah provided her youthful visitor with a vessel of water in which to bathe his feet, after the Eastern custom, and placed before him a frugal meal of goat's-milk, cheese, and cakes of kneaded flour. Then seating herself upon the couch by his side, she listened with interest to his history of the last three years, and when he had re-

heard the tragedy of the Forest of Lebanon, and the subsequent escape of Asher to Kedesh, she said :

"And to-morrow thou proposest going to the city of Refuge?"

Elam's lips faltered as he answered, "I—I wish much to see his dear face ; but—"

Old Deborah questioned him as to the cause of his embarrassment. "I must tell thee all," said he. "If to-morrow finds me spared and well, I am proposing to take a longer journey ere I go to Kedesh, and on thy kind offices my purpose much depends. I must tell thee that I design traveling without delay to Jerusalem."

At first she wondered at so young a traveler's anticipating by several weeks the time of the Passover ; but her look of astonishment changed to one of tenderness as she listened to the unfolding of the bold plan his filial tenderness had prompted him to form. Elam minutely explained all to her, and showed how his sole chance for success depended upon the influence which her son Hiram would be likely to possess over King Solomon. Considerations of safety for him prompted her at first to urge a delay upon him until the thousands of Israel should be crowding the thoroughfares to the Holy City. But his youthful ardor could not brook delay, and old Deborah was not one to check the brave and generous resolve. And so she set herself to secure for him a safe conduct to Jerusalem in company with the band of Levites and Shepherds who were going up with flocks for the sacrifice. On the morning of his departure she gave him such directions as were necessary, and filled his srip with

what she thought he would most need on the journey. On bidding him farewell and God-speed, she drew from her finger a ring of Tyrian workmanship, on which were engraved her initials, and those of her distinguished son. It was the Signet of Hiram, the artificer.

"There," said she, as she placed it in his possession ; "this will be a token between my son and thee, and between me and thee. It may open to thee many friendly doors on thy way, and give thee access to the heart and home of my only child."

And so the young mountainier of Lebanon, glad at heart, and filled with gratitude to the God of Israel who had thus far prospered him on his way, set out, with high hopes, on the road to Jerusalem.

That afternoon found our young traveler and his companions gliding smoothly along over the still waters of the Lake of Gennesaret, then known as the Sea of Chinnereth. They entered it at the junction of the river Jordan, whose banks were of rich pasture grounds, occupied by the flocks and herds of a somewhat sparse population. As they approached the lower end of the lake the scenery assumed bolder characteristics. The rich plains gave place to craggy slopes which jutted into the water, and were, sometimes, covered with the oleander and the olive. Reeds, willows, tamarinds grew here and there along the banks, where the stork and the pelican had their nests, and which were occasionally seen rearing their heads to take a view of the travelers, and then hiding away in the solitude of the marshes. It was, as we have written, in the spring time, and the voice of the turtle was heard in the

land." The company, too, were joyous and light-hearted as the spring time around them, for were they not on the way to celebrate the feast of the Passover, and were not their eyes to be gladdened by beholding the Holy City, the pride of the Jewish nation? And now and again they broke forth in some song of Zion, like this:

"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts,
My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord:
My heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God:
Blessed are they that dwell in thy house, they will be still praising thee!"

Reaching the southern extremity of the Lake, they encamped, in their goat's-hair tents, on the banks of Jordan. And now young Elam beheld a sight which stirred his boyish enthusiasm to the highest pitch, notwithstanding the heavy burden on his heart. Over the sparkling waters, in silvery stateliness, rose the moon which preceded the full Passover one, tipping the stately palms with fringes of silver, which vied in brightness with the white tents of the pilgrims. Together then they turned their faces towards Jerusalem and chanted:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help;
My help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.
He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; he that keepeth thee will not slumber,
Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep!"

And so they retired to rest. But not long were they allowed to sleep, for under the clear moon and soft air the night was the most favorable time for travel, and they could repose during the heat of the noonday. The moon and stars shone brightly as they resumed their sandals

and scrip and girded themselves anew. At first the route lay through dense thickets which partially obscured the light of the heavenly bodies, and myriads of fire-flies winged their luminous flight over their hearts. The Jordan murmured on their left, and Mount Tabor and the hills around Nazareth were on the right, their dimly defined outlines blending with the sky. As the early morning dawned they grew more and more distinct, and soon their varied and beautiful forms stood fully revealed, their tops tipped with roseate light. Surrounded with scenes of such exquisite beauty and loveliness, the heart of our young mountaineer responded in full tones to the words of the Psalmist:

"I wait for thee, O Lord; my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.
My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning!"

But we are lingering too long over the journey. Hour after hour they passed on over hallowed spots, each having its own memorable history. They skirted the vast plain of Esdraelon and passed under the shadow of Mount Gilboa where King David had lamented over fallen greatness, and ere the evening came on were in the south of famed Galilee, where again they pitched their tents. And here the eyes of Elam were greeted by another sight. Far on the mountain tops around them gleamed the beacon fires, which gave intimation that in Jerusalem all things were ready for the feast. His eyes filled with tears as he reflected, that, perhaps, from the window of his narrow abode in the Refuge City of Kedesli, his father might be gazing in sorrow on those signal lights, and with a heavy

heart he went to the hard couch which one of his Levite companions had kindly shared with him. But, fatigue, and the novelty of his situation, forbade long mourning, and he was lulled to sleep by the music of many voices chaunting:

"Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee, Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces, For my brethren and companion's sake I will now say, Peace be within thee."

CHAPTER V.

Jerusalem! What heart does not bound at the mere mention of that name? What a history she possesses. How full are all of her environs with places of thrilling interest. "Beautiful" says the Holy Writ, "beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mt. Zion, on the sides of the North, the city of the Great King." King David had left his capitol city in a prosperous condition—her streets compact, her trade flourishing, her population teeming. And her mystic sacrifices—her solemn feasts—the glitter and the splendor of her wealth—all these conspired to make her the centre of attraction for the Jewish people. To all these Solomon had added immeasurably, and at the time when the young Lebanon mountaineer first beheld her glittering in the distance, under the rays of the early morning sun, she had arrived at the summit of her magnificence, only one thing being wanted to crown her glory, the completion and dedication of the Temple

to the living God on Mount Moriah. The surroundings of the city corresponded with the magnificence within its walls. Where the waters of the brook Kedron flowed murmuringly through the rocky dell at the foot of the Mount of Olives, royal gardens were laid out with every variety of tree and flower. The vale of Hinnom, with its gently undulating slopes, bounded the city on the south, while the Mount of Olives, with its triple summit and dense groves, towered above all the rest, and looked down on a combination of glories at its base to which no spot on earth could afford a parallel.

It would be strange indeed if one who possessed the fervid imagination of the young Elam had failed to be struck with the picture which lay before him. As he neared the city, the first object of interest to his eyes was the great Temple, then drawing towards its completion. Filial affection gave it, for him, a still deeper interest; for in that wondrous pile were timbers felled and fashioned by his father on the heights of Lebanon, and that father now languished in a strange city, a prisoner to the law. But not long did he allow gloomy thoughts to cloud his brow. One building he discerned of dimensions more vast than any other. It occupied a commanding elevation, and flanked with buttresses, and separated by trees and an enclosure from the surrounding edifices. This was the spot he sought; here were the gates he most desired to enter. It was the palace of David the minstrel King, and here King Solomon held his court. Elam had received instructions from his traveling companions as to where Hiram of Tyre was to be found, and directed his

steps to a spot near the place, where a building had been set apart for his use. But the labors of the day were over, and Hiram had retired to his private residence in the little village of Bethany hard by. He chose to abide here that he might be away from the throng of workmen, and near to the clay grounds of the Jordan, where the pillars of the porch and the holy vessels of the Temple were cast. Although wearied and toil-worn, thither did Elam direct his steps. As he descended by the eastern gate of the Temple, the fast declining sun was pouring a flood of glory over the mountains around the city. He crossed the Kedron and skirted the mountain close by Gethsemane, and reaching the crest of Olivet, he paused to survey the most striking scene his eyes had ever beheld. Around him were scattered groups of the olive tree, with here and there the oleander and the wild almond. The Kedron's usually scanty flood was now swelled by the rains of spring, and ran tumbling and brawling below. Stretching to the left was the Valley of Hinnom, whose northern slope was surmounted by the walls of the city of David, and the loftier towers of the royal palace. Immediately in front, on the opposite side of the valley of the brook Kedron, was the crowning glory of all, the Temple, with its spacious courts and colonades. He beheld the vast wall, with its almost incredible stones, which rose on the southern side of Mt. Moriah. He saw, too, Jachin and Boaz, the pillars of the Porch, which stood glittering before him, with their capitals of lily work, net-work, and pomegranate. They had recently been set up, and stood there, like golden sentinels, to guard the sacred precincts.

It was twilight when he reached Bethany, and he lost no time in making inquiry for the dwelling of Hiram. It was easily found, and the signet ring gained him ready admission. In a brief space of time he stood in the presence of the Master Builder. Hiram of Tyre was then a man in middle life, rather below the ordinary stature. Upon his head he wore a crimson cap or turban, of such size as to partially conceal a broad and capacious forehead. He was reclining on a couch by a table covered with rolls of papyrus and parchment, which were spread out before him, and which he was examining by the light of a seven branched lamp of curious workmanship.

Dispersed throughout the chamber were many rare specimens of Tyrian handcraft, draperies of purple, jars, vases, flacons, and the floor was of the celebrated checkered pavement which had then only been used in the dwelling of kings and princes. He greeted Elam kindly, and his fine eyes kindled at sight of the signet ring, for it carried him back in memory to the side of his mother Deborah, for whom he entertained the most unbounded affection. His heart was full of kind emotions, and he listened with much interest to the tale of the young mountaineer. After some time spent in familiar converse, a couch was spread for our young traveler, and Hiram of Tyre invited him to share a draught of the red wine of Engeddi, mingled with the juice of the pomegranate. The toil-worn feet of the youth were refreshed with a cooling bath, and then he retired to rest. When the Master Builder awoke early next morning, Elam, fatigued by his unwonted journey, still slept. He left him in charge of his

wife and children, and repaired to his rooms near the King's Palace. The boy's tale had made a deep impression on Hiram's mind, and his kindly nature, no less than the commands of his mother, as expressed in sending to him the Signet, prompted him to do what he could to further the lad's bold effort at speech with King Solomon. To an ordinary person, access to the King was difficult to be obtained. But by virtue of his high office, Hiram of Tyre not unfrequently held long personal interviews with Solomon; yet, not to him, even, were the doors of the palace open at all times, and he was too well acquainted with court etiquette to venture on an unwarrantable liberty. However, he had not long to wait for a favorable opportunity to introduce the story and name of the young Hebrew. Solomon, being that day absent at his summer place at Heshbon, his Chief Chamberlain availed himself of the opportunity to visit the Tyrian artificer and examine the numerous specimens of his wondrous skill with which his rooms abounded. To him the story was related. The royal servant listened with an apparent apathy which gave Hiram little promise of encouragement; and what the chamberlain did say confirmed him in his fears that there was no probability of any relaxation in the Jewish law relating to blood-revenge. But the official had been more interested in the tale than his manner showed. That very night, on the King's return he introduced the matter as a subject of conversation, while they were seated in the banquet hall. Solomon, ever alive to the claims of the suffering and the destitute, and capable of more than most of his dependent courtiers of appreciating

filial tenderness and worth, resolved to see the youth with his own eyes, and himself hear and determine his cause. So the delay of a day, which fretted Elam very much, proved to him of great benefit in the end, and he passed the second night of his stay with Hiram in pleasant dreams of home and liberty for his father.

CHAPTER VI.

The magnificent palace of King Solomon contained a vast Hall which was called "The House of the Forest of Lebanon." The ceiling was of great height, and beautifully adorned with draperies of blue and purple hung from golden cornices which were supported by pillars of marble. The walls were enameled with parti-colored stones interspersed with warlike devices. Trophies of the battles of King David, the spears, helmets, and swords, taken from his enemies, were grouped here and there, and arranged on marble pedestals were golden vessels, interspersed with shields and helmets of beaten gold. Massive rafters of cedar, supported by cedar pillars, and adorned by devices of silver and gold, added much to the grandeur of the room. At the southern end of the Hall were the two "porches of Justice," and in one of these was set the throne of judgment. How shall we describe it? Language fails, and we will not attempt to do so in detail. It was made of pure ivory and gold, and was raised six steps above the floor of the Hall, those steps being

supported by twelve sculptured lions, emblematic of the tribes of Israel. On this magnificent seat sat the King, fully robed, on the morning when Elam was to be brought into the royal presence. Right regally was he attired. His raiment glittered with gems, a tiara of untold richness was on his head, and bracelets of gold were on his neck and arms. In crimson and gold stood about the throne the officers of his court, and near were groups of the princes and nobles of the people, mingled with priests and Levites in official attire, who had come to pay homage or seek an audience with the King. Behind the throne, in triple rows, clad in Tyrian purple and armed with bow and quiver, stood the royal body-guard, their long, jet ringlets of hair falling over their shoulders, and sparkling with gold-dust.

Such was the scene at the moment when young Elam was introduced and escorted to the foot of the throne where he knelt in lowly obeisance to his King, and kissed the white marble steps of the throne. Hiram's wife had replaced his soiled and travel-stained garments by a graceful tunic, and as he knelt and bent low before the King his long black locks swept over his agitated face, and contrasted pleasingly with the snow-white marble on which he was prone. All eyes were directed towards him as the King, addressing the chamberlain, said:

"So this, then, is the young mountain courier?"

"It is, O King," replied he.

"Rise up, child of Lebanon—rise, and fear not," said the King. "I have heard of the heroism of thy young spirit;

it was worthy of a more hopeful cause. How far hast thou traveled on this errand of mercy?"

"It is two weeks, O King, since thy servant left his home, and nothing but love for the kindest of fathers could give me courage to stand in thy presence."

"Thy father is where?"

"He hath taken refuge in thy Refuge City of Kadesh," said Elam, the tears stealing down his cheeks as he spoke.

"Taken refuge there from the avenger of blood? Tell me, brave youth," said the King, "come nearer and tell me of the event which led to this separation."

Thus encouraged, Elam detailed, in tremulous accents, the tragedy on Mt. Lebanon, and when he had finished he cast an imploring look on the monarch. A tear moistened the eye of the King as he said:

"Hark thee, brave boy, thy heroism deserveth every mark of royal favor, and it shall not go unrequited. But—"

Elam's heart sank as he marked the hesitatingly spoken word, and said, with energy:

"It was the thought of my heart, O, mighty King, that thy word is the word of God. The Lord's anointed surely hath but to speak and the arm of the avenger will be staid!"

"Not so—not so, boy! I owe my sceptre to a mightier power than that of any earthly King. I am but the servant of the Most High God. His laws and edicts I must obey. The law touching blood-revenge was not the enactment of our father Moses, but of the God of Israel, who gave him the law. I cannot, I dare not tamper with the

ordinances of Him whose servant I am. Say to thy father in Kedesh his Sovereign bids him exercise submission to the Divine will, and take comfort from the words of his former monarch; 'I have been young, but now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread!'

The boy suppressed a sob, as he answered, "thy will, O King, and the will of God be done! Thy servant can at least return and cheer his father's captivity by telling him of thy goodness in lending a willing ear to this tale of sorrow." Saying which Elam again bowed himself on the marble pavement, and turned to withdraw.

"Stay!" commanded the King; and turning to his chamberlain he said: "Command thou that two changes of raiment and a talent of gold be conveyed to the boy's dwelling; and let his name have honorable mention on our register."

Elam bowed once more to the ground, and then with many strange and mingled feelings he hastened from the palace gate and paused not until he reached once more the house of his kind friend Hiram. Here, seated on his couch, the tears of sorrow and disappointment coursing down his cheeks, he related to the wife of the artificer the incidents of his interview. When he had finished his tale the good woman did her best to comfort the youth, bidding him put his trust in Him who is mighty to save. She also reminded him that it was the eve of the Passover, and bade him consider himself a part of the family until its close. Then, her husband having meantime returned, she proceeded, according to the instructions of the Jewish

ritual, to cast out the unleavened bread. All over the house, with a lighted lamp she went, strictly examining the smallest corner or hole where it was possible for leaven, in any shape, to be lodged. The next morning, before noon, all that could be found was carefully burned, or thrown into the water, or scattered to the wind; and every one, as he thus put it away, was accustomed to repeat the established form of execration, "All the leaven that is within my possession, which I have seen or which I have not seen, which I have cast out or which I have not cast out, be it as though it were not! be it as the dust of the earth." Thus was every house purged for the celebration of the passover; and after this it was not considered proper even so much as to make use of the word leaven, lest the thought of it should pollute the mind. The unleavened bread which was now prepared for use, was baked in the form of thin cakes, full of holes, to keep them from the slightest fermentation, unseasoned with salt, and made only with water, without any sort of oil; in some cases the higher class of the people had them enriched with sugar and eggs, though even such bread was not allowed on the first day of the feast, but only on those that followed.

The lambs were all slain, as other sacrifices, in the Court of the priests. It was a great work to kill and dress so many as were necessary for the occasion, and required a considerable part of the afternoon of the 14th day for its execution. The Evening Sacrifice accordingly, on that day, was offered before the middle of the afternoon, and the rest of the day, from that time to the end of it, was

occupied altogether with this preparation for the passover. Though only one person of each family or society entered into the court of sacrifice with the lamb that belonged to it, it needs not to be remarked, that it was still impossible for all these to go in at once. They were accordingly divided into three large companies, which were admitted one at a time in succession. When one of these companies entered, the gates were closed, and immediately the owners of the lambs, or those who brought them in, began to assist each other in killing them, taking off their skins, and removing the entrails and fat. The blood was handed to the priests, to be sprinkled on the altar and poured out at its bottom, and the common portions of fat to be burned upon its top; these standing all along in rows from the slaughtering places to the altar, and passing the articles from one to another continually to where it stood. Meanwhile the Levites sang over, once, twice, or three times, the 113th, 114th, 115th, 116th, 117th, and 118th Psalms. These were denominated, when taken together, the Hallel or hymn of praise, and sometimes the Lesser Hallel, to distinguish it from another that was in use, styled the greater Hallel. As soon as the first company had their work done, they went out, and the second took their place, going over the same business in the same style; so in their turn, the third one filled the court; after which it was all washed over with water, as we may well suppose it needed to be after such an immense slaughter.

The lambs thus butchered were carried away to the several houses where they were to be eaten, and immediately made ready for roasting, by being thrust through from

one end to the other, by a wooden spit or stake, and so placed before a large fire. According to the commandment, each was allowed to be thus exposed, till it was roasted in a perfectly thorough manner. Soon after it became dark, that is, with the commencement of the 15th day, the passover table was spread, and surrounded by its little company, in all the houses of Jerusalem.

The supper commenced with the ceremony of drinking a small cup of wine mingled with water, after having given thanks over it to God the Giver of all blessings. Every one had a separate cup poured out, but only one uttered the thanksgiving in the name of all. This was the first cup. Then followed the washing of hands, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, accompanied with another short form of thanksgiving to God. The table having been till this time unfurnished, was now supplied with its provisions, viz: the cakes of unleavened bread, the bitter salad, the lamb roasted whole, with its legs, heart, liver, &c., and, besides, some other meat prepared from the flesh of common peace offerings, that had been presented during the day, and a dish of thick sauce composed of dates, eggs, raisins, vinegar, &c.

The table thus furnished, the leading person, and all the rest after him, took a small quantity of the salad, with another thanksgiving and ate it. After which, immediately, all the dishes were removed from the table, and a second cup of wine placed before each of the company, as at first. The strange way of beginning the meal was designed to excite the curiosity of the children, that they might be led to inquire what it meant, according to what is said in

Ex. xii. 26. When the inquiry was made, (for if there was no child present, the wife or some other person brought it forward,) the person who presided began and told how their fathers had all been servants in Egypt, and how with many signs and wonders the Lord had redeemed them from their cruel bondage, and brought them forth from the place of their cruel oppression, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. As he concluded the interesting story of Jehovah's mercies, the dishes that had been removed were again placed upon the table; whereupon he said, "This is the passover which we eat, because that the Lord passed over the houses of our fathers in Egypt;" and then holding up the salad, and after it the unleavened bread, he stated their design, viz: that the one represented the bitterness of the Egyptian bondage, and the other the sudden redemption which the Lord wrought on their behalf, when he smote the first-born of their oppressors, so that they urged his people to depart without delay. Then he repeated the 113th and 114th Psalms and closed with this prayer: "Blessed be thou, O Lord our God, King Everlasting! who hast redeemed our fathers out of Egypt, and brought us to this night to eat unleavened bread and bitter herbs;" which being uttered, all the company drank the wine that had been standing for some time before them. This was the second cup.

Another washing of the hands now took place, when the person who presided, taking up the unleavened bread, broke one of the cakes in two, again gave thanks to God, and then, with the rest, began to eat; each first making use of a piece of bread, with some of the salad, and the

thick sauce, then partaking of the peace offering meat, and last of all of the paschal lamb, with a separate thanksgiving still pronounced before each dish. Every one was required to eat as much of the lamb as was equal to the size of an olive. The meal thus over, they all washed again, according to the usage of common meals, and then united in drinking another cup of wine and water. This was the third cup and was called by way of distinction, "the cup of blessing," because while it stood before them ready to be drunk, the leader was accustomed to return thanks over it in a particular manner, for the blessing of the sacred supper, and for all the goodness of the Lord. There was yet another cup made ready a little time after, just before the company rose from the table. It was denominated the cup of the Hallel; because it was the custom to repeat, in connection with it, the principal part of the hymn of Lesser Hallel: for as it was begun by the rehearsal of its first two psalms, the 113th and the 114th, over the second cup, (as we have seen,) so it was now finished by being carried on through the following four. In all common cases, this fourth cup closed the celebration of the feast. It was held to be a duty absolutely incumbent upon all who took part in the supper, men or women, young or old, rich or poor, to make use of all the four cups that have been mentioned.

The youthful Elam observed with much interest all the proceedings of the Passover week, and at its close prepared for his long and toilsome journey to Kedesh and home.

CHAPTER VII.

Jerusalem had more than one visitor from the valley of Abdol during the Passover week. The footsteps of Elam had been dogged during his entire journey from his Lebanon home to the walls of the Sacred City. Jahaz the Avenger; had, for reasons best known to himself, kept the youth in sight, determined, if possible, to know something of his plans and purposes, if so be he might, by the aid of that knowledge, yet accomplish his bloody purpose of slaying Asher. While the latter remained in the Refuge City, Jahaz did not dare attempt to slay him, but he hoped to devise some plan to inveigle him without the gates of the city, and there and then accomplish his fell purpose. He knew the object of Elam's visit to the King, and on the day of his audience he lingered in disguise about the palace gates. He saw by the youth's sorrowful countenance as he passed out from Solomon's presence that his mission had been unsuccessful, and therefore he had no further need to keep up his espionage so closely. He had other work to do, and he set about it at once.

That night, in a lonely dell near Kedron brook, and hard by the city, there was a lengthened consultation between a small band of craftsmen from the Temple and this arch villian. They were Tyrians whom Jahaz had known in years gone by, and whom he had sought out on his arrival at Jerusalem, and privately summoned them to meet him there. Like himself they were men of no

principle, and ripe for any evil deed. They went to the rendezvous singly, so as not to attract attention, and arriving one by one were informed by their self-constituted chief of his plans. From seafaring men he had heard glowing accounts of the wealth of Egypt and Ethiopia, and his plan was to organize a band of desperate men, seize a ship, and proceeding thither, lead a life of lawlessness and ease. "Brothers," said he, "why toil ye here for a pittance of corn and wine, with taskmasters over ye, when ease and luxury may be had for a trifling effort? Ye were told in fair words that great secrets should be yours if ye would but serve the Jewish King for a season. Ye have toiled now these many years, and what thank have ye? Will the word of Hiram be kept! I tell ye nay."

"But," said one, "there is yet a chance to obtain from the Master that for which we have wrought. Let us wait until the Temple is completed, then, with the secrets of a Master in our possession, we shall be able to travel in foreign countries at our will."

"Aye," said the third, "there is wisdom in that, brother Jahaz; we must have the secret word of a Master—it will open to us gates we may not otherwise be able to unlock."

"The secret word of a Master!" exclaimed Jahaz scornfully, "are ye so weak-minded? Know ye not that we are deemed unfit to obtain it by this pampered slave of two Kings—this upstart Hiram of Tyre? Know ye not that both of ye are down on the Master's roll as disturbers of the peace and harmony of the craft? Am not I, myself, proscribed and my name stricken from the roll of

workmen for daring to contend with the overseer of the work in Lebanon, Asher of Abdol? My curse be upon him, and on them who clothed him with authority! This hand shall yet let out his tainted blood!"

"There is much truth in thy words," said the other. "Do ye not remember the words of the promise? 'Upon them only which are worthy and well qualified will I bestow the the new name,' said the Master; and who but himself is to be the Judge? I fear me, brother Jahaz, we are as little like to obtain the word as thou art."

"There is but one way to obtain it," said Jahaz, reflectively. "Who knows the courage of Hiram of Tyre? Methinks it were an easy matter to extort the secret from him. The pampered favorites of courts are not apt to be overstocked with bravery."

"But what wouldst thou do," said the first speaker, "if he boldly withstood thee and bluntly refused thy demand?"

"Then, by my beard," said Jahaz, "I would strangle him as one would choke to death a blind puppy. He has twice crossed my path already—let him beware of the third time."

But we need not tarry longer with these midnight conspirators. What the result of their confabulation was we shall see ere the close of our story.

CHAPTER VIII.

On a pleasant afternoon, near the close of the Passover month, old Deborah of Geshur beheld, at a distance, the

figure she had been long expecting and wishing to see. Day after day she had been seated by her distaff, close by the lattice, looking for the return of young Elam. Occasionally she would venture out with her crooked staff to the middle of the road, and gaze with her dim old eyes for some appearance of the expected traveler. More than willingly had her son Hiram prolonged his hospitality to the lad until the solemnities of the Passover were concluded and Elam had thereby the advantage of enjoying on his return homewards the company of some of his fellow-worshippers. He availed himself of their society all the way through the great valley of the Jordan until they arrived at the waters of Merom, where a foot-path diverged from the highway, conducting to the house of Deborah. Gratified indeed was he to find himself once more an inmate of her residence. With pleased interest she listened to the incidents he had to narrate of Hiram, the Temple, the King. He delivered into her hands, also, a parcel sent by her son, containing Egyptian linen and a copy of the Pentateuch, and he returned to her hands the valued ring which had served him so well.

"And Israel's many thousands," said old Deborah, as Elam paused in his narrative, "are they faithful as ever to the holy convocation?"

"Yea, truly. Never can I forget that scene. Thy son and myself were wont at times to stand, on our return to Bethany, on the ridge of Olivet, and watch the multitudes threading their way through the valleys and plains—the music of their voices borne on the evening breeze, their songs swelling louder as they caught a first glimpse of the

city of our God. And on the night of the Passover, when returning from the holy service under a clear moon, and looking down the valley of Kedron, thousands of white tents dotted the mountain sides and the hum from the city was like the noise from a restless sea."

"Sawest thou the anointed of Jehovah, the high priest of Israel?"

"I did,—a venerable old man with a snowy beard and tottering step. I saw, too, his breast-plate glittering with its precious stones, his robe of blue, embroidered with purple and scarlet, and the golden bells."

"The blessing of Jehovah be on him, my son, I rejoice to hear thy testimony. But I see thou art weary with this journey. Thy couch is spread, and ready. It is needful to betake thyself to rest."

Exhausted with the fatigues of his travel, Elam willingly acquiesced, and he did so more readily as he had resolved to renew his journey on the morrow. He could not linger, when a few hours more travel would take him to Kedesh, and place him face to face with his beloved father. So the next forenoon found him on his way. At mid-day he paused by the banks of Jordan, and was ferried across to the other side on a rude raft, with another traveler whom he had observed for some time behind him. The latter sat on the raft muffled in a loose tunic, and wore a cap which almost entirely covered his features. He had a basket slung by his side, containing trinkets of various kinds, which seemed to indicate the nature of his support in his wandering life.

Elam was too much engrossed with the thought that in

a few hours he should stand in the presence of his father to notice his fellow-traveler. But there was something striking and singular in the man's countenance and manner; when he did speak, the tones of his voice, proceeding from beneath a long, flowing, grizzly beard, seemed not altogether unfamiliar; and the boy could not fail to remark the penetrating glances from time to time cast upon him from eyes that were screened by bushy eyebrows, which gave an appearance that, to say the least, was not at all prepossessing. Arrived at the opposite bank, Elam paid his fare, and was adjusting his sandals to resume his journey, when the stranger, in a rough and unmusical voice inquired if he were going to Kedesh, and offered, if he were a stranger, to be his guide and companion. The youth could not help being struck with the singular and assumed familiarity of the Jew. He seemed as kind as one of his stern voice and manner could be, and yet there was a dissembled effort to get Elam to inform him of his own history and that of his family, where he had been, and what had caused one so young to take so long a journey. Such an impression did his disingenuous manner produce that the boy was really pleased when, on their reaching a village some distance from Kedesh, the stranger announced that he would tarry there, and leave him to complete his journey alone.

Our young traveler obtained easy access within the gates of the refuge city, and had little difficulty in finding the dwelling of Asher of Abdol. The visions of Jerusalem's magnificence were floating before his mind's eye, as he climbed, with trembling heart the dark and winding

stairs, and marked the painful contrast. A tap at the door was answered by the music of a well known voice bidding him enter and in a moment father and son were clasped in each other's arms.

CHAPTER IX.

The joy of father and son at their re-union was mutual. In broken accents Asher gave thanks to the God of Israel for raising him up so trusty and well formed a son. "And how," said he, "didst thou leave my other dear ones? Thy mother and thy tender sister, and old Gideon—are they well?"

The youth blushed and stammered—his father knew not of his recent journey. At length he asked, "Hast thou not seen old Gideon lately, then?"

"Nay," said Asher, "The good old man hath tarried long with thee this season. I have been waiting eagerly for his return. How fareth it with him?"

"Well, for aught I know," replied the boy. "I have not seen him for many weeks. I must tell thee I have been keeping the feast at Jerusalem."

"At Jerusalem!" exclaimed Asher. "And yet I thought as much. It is well—would that I could have been with thee to tell thee of the many things thou shouldst know in regard to the holy feast."

Elam explained that his home while at the Passover had been with Hiram of Tyre, who had, with fatherly care, considered him as one of his own household. He then narrated the interview with King Solomon, and with bitter tears lamented the failure of his mission. But his father comforted him, saying, with much emotion, that he would willingly suffer ten such separations to feel that he had such a son. Their busy converse was soon interrupted by footsteps without the door, and the well-known tap of a pilgrim's staff. "Enter thou holy man of God," said Asher. And as old Gideon's tottering steps crossed the threshold he added, with his greeting:

"Thou couldst not have come at a more fitting moment. How can I be lonely with the aged friend of my adversity and the child of my fondest affection both at my side?"

"The Lord be with thee!", said the old man, in a faint voice, "and with thee, too, my son!" observing with his dim old eyes the form of Elam a moment after. Then he sank exhausted upon a couch—the journey had been too too much for his feeble frame. A little water revived him, and in haste they prepared a comfortable bed for him, hoping a few hours repose would recruit his exhausted energies. But all at once he made an attempt to raise himself from his pillow on his withered arm.

"Hark ye!" he exclaimed, with unwonted force; "the days of Gideon of Zaphar are numbered—my sands of life are run out. I shall soon be gathered to my fathers. Four score and ten years have I been a pilgrim on the earth, and now that I am passing away but one thing do I desire. Let these bones be laid in the sepulcher of the house

of Lemuel in the valley of Abdol." He paused as if to gather his remaining strength, and then he continued: "One word ere this tongue falters and this slow beating heart ceases forever its pulsations. Beware! Let Asher keep faithfully within the walls of Kedesh. His enemy the avenger, lurks without. Moreover, let the boy Elam hasten without delay to the protection of his mother."

These broken sentences struck Elam with much force tending as they did to confirm suspicions that before now had flashed upon him as to the stranger who had dogged his footsteps from the home of old Deborah.

"Does Jahaz, then, lurk outside the city walls?" he enquired in a suppressed tone.

"He crossed the Jordan with thee to-day, my son. Hasten! hasten to thy home; his hardness of heart may lead him to fearful deeds."

"And must we see thy face no more, good father?" said Asher to the dying prophet.

"We shall meet in a better country, my son," said old Gideon. "Lo! I am nearing the gates—the gates of the true City of Refuge; angels are beckoning me—glorious King of Kings, I come! Glory—glory!" and old Gideon of Zaphar closed his dim eyes on earth to open them in the new Jerusalem above.

The tidings quickly spread through Kedesh that the wanderer had gone home. As was customary in Israel on such solemn occasions, the matrons of the city who had enjoyed his friendship and prized his worth, gathered about his death-bed to bewail a patriarch in Israel, and to embalm his body with aloes, myrrh, and spices. For two

successive nights lights were gleaming in the chamber where the revered ashes lay, and the plaintive and impassioned dirges told the heavy loss which many a widowed and orphaned heart had sustained.

When the aged Gideon had breathed his last, Elam hastened his preparations, at the request of his father, to return to his Lebanon home. The mysterious allusions of the old man to the necessity of such a step showed him the propriety of leaving old Gideon's Kedesh friends to the care of his obsequies. Before his departure he arranged as to the day when the mournful funeral procession might be expected in the valley of Abdol, and embracing his father, he took his staff and scrip and hastened on his way to his mother and sister.

On reaching the cottage, he soon discovered the cause of his old friend's urgency. Jahaz had hurried one of his confederates on from Jerusalem to Abdol, in the hope that Asher might, believing him to be out of the way, return to the bosom of his family, and so fall an easy prey to him.

A day or two before the arrival of Elam at the fords of Jordan, a dusty traveler approached the door of the cottage and asked for food and drink. Bithiah treated him kindly, and courteously entertained him, while Rachel provided him with refreshments.

"May I ask," said he, "if it was not near here where Jahaz lived?"

"It is not far from this," said Bithiah, in a trembling voice. "Dost thou know him, or about him?"

"Thy servant knew him," returned the traveler. "I met

him some weeks since at the port of Tyre. He looked dejected and sad, and told me he was to sail that evening for Cyprus, never to return."

"And canst thou not tell me more of him?"

"Alas! that I can," continued he, in a melancholy voice. I heard but yesterday of his fate. The vessel in which he sailed encountered a storm the very next day, off the coast of Phenecia, and was wrecked. All on board perished."

Bithiah was completely deceived, and in the fullness of her simplicity, she detailed the story of the tragedy in the mountains of Lebanon. He seemed to listen with profound interest, and as she concluded, he said:

"I feel glad in the thought that a lonely wayfarer hath been permitted to bear to thee glad tidings."

"Dost thou mean," said Bithiah, "that now my husband may return from the Refuge City? would it were so," she exclaimed, with clasped hands.

"It would be perfectly safe," said the dissimulator, "as thy servant can testify. Jahaz told me, as a reason for his self-banishment, that he was the last of his race, and had no tie to bind him longer to this land. If there be no other kinsman to take the place of the avenger thy husband may return with impunity."

"Joyful day would it be to this heart," said Bithiah and tears of gratitude shone in her eyes.

"Hast thou," said he, "any messenger to carry tidings to thy husband?"

"I have a little son," she replied, "whose return I am daily looking for. When he comes back I shall—but stay, I have a trustier messenger still: an aged man, Gid-

eon of Zaphar is with me. I expect him every moment. To him will I entrust the cheering message."

At this the traveler arose and bidding her adieu started on his journey.

No sooner had old Gideon returned than Bithiah, with trembling eagerness, narrated the tidings she had just received. He at once saw the cruel deception that had been practiced on her, and divined its object.

"Nay," said he, "believe it not. The information of old and faithful Gideon is more to be relied on than that of a nameless wanderer. Take my word for it, Jahaz still lives. As thou valuest the safety of Asher, wait the Lord's time, and he will continue that grace which has supported thee hitherto."

And now he felt that he must hasten to warn Asher of his impending danger—Without the walls of Kedesh he had seen the avenger. The journey, as we have seen, was his last. His eagerness had over-taxed his already feeble frame, and, his life-work done, he was taken to his final rest.

CHAPTER X.

In a deep dell within a stone's throw of the Lebanon cottage of Asher, concealed amid copse and brushwood, and reached by a difficult and intricate path which led through masses of disjointed rock, was the burying-place,

the sepulcher of the house of Asher. It was a cave hollowed out of the precipice. A huge stone closed its mouth, secured in its place by iron bars and bolts. This was the chosen resting place of old Gideon of Zaphar.

It was on a bright evening in the month of Zif, when the sun was casting his last beams athwart the valley of Abdol, imparting a solemn and sombre glory to the beautiful summer tints around, when a strange and unwonted sound of wailing lamentation was heard disturbing the quiet of that sequestered spot. By-and-by a slow procession was seen winding by the margin of the stream, making towards the sepulcher. It was the body of the old prophet, which was being borne with all the pomp and pageantry of an ancient Jewish funeral occasion. The bier was carried on the shoulders of some aged men who were attired in white robes. They were citizens of Kedesh, the city where Gideon had passed so many of the years of his long and useful life. Numerous mourners were in the train, gathered from the remotest corners of the province to pay a last tribute to the departed. Others there were who were residents of the valley and slopes of Lebanon to whom the old man was well-known for his unwearied kindness and his sympathy shown to the house of Asher. Among them were the wood-cutters who, a year and a half before, had stood before the gates of Kedesh, and in the judgment hall at the trial of the unfortunate man-slayer. Elam was there, too, and leaning on his arm the tottering form of his mother, her sightless eyes filled with tears. And yet another was there. Stationed on a rocky ledge, just at the mouth of the cave

was the venerable mother of Hiram of Tyre, old Deborah of Geshur. She was clad in a large woolen cloak, and in her hands she held her pilgrim's staff. Her form, once erect and finely moulded, was now bent with age, and as she stooped over the entrance she seemed likely indeed to be the next for whom the daughters of Israel should take up the lamentation.

Until now the cries of the hired mourners had been heard loud in their wailings, but as the body approached the sepulchre their voices suddenly ceased, and the procession halted. Then in tones of wild and thrilling eloquence arose the voice of old Deborah: "Men of Judah," she said, "daughters of Israel—a mighty cedar of Lebanon has fallen! The forest is this day trembling for the blank! Many are those his branches have sheltered; many weak ones have encamped under them, and the lowering tempest touched them not! But he himself had to bow to the storm; yea, the mighty storm has laid him low, and the daughters of Zion and the widows of Naphtali seek in vain for the majesty of his shadow! Deborah of Geshur is left alone. The saplings are growing around her, but the twin-cedar of her tribe has fallen, and the aged mother in Israel is left alone to bend before the blast of death. Enter—enter this dark tomb. Enter ye, that bear this mighty one! Deborah of Geshur will soon follow. But the tree has not fallen for naught. The Temple which the Lord our God is building—the house not made with hands—needs it! Put ye here the worthless bark into the tomb; close it up with the great stone; put ye bars and bolts of iron upon it; but the cedar itself is for the house

of God! The God of Israel desired a pillar for his house, and therefore is Gideon of Zaphar no more. The lamentation of Deborah of Geshur is ended!"

As the voice of the prophetess ceased, the supporters of the bier rent their sack-cloth garments, and taking up the bier again, preceded by youths bearing lighted torches, they entered the darksome cell. They deposited their burden in a rude niche hollowed out of the rock, and then having rolled the stone to the door, and thus secured the mouth of the cave, the mourners quietly dispersed.

Slowly the months passed on, and again the peaks of Lebanon were whitened with snow. Weary were the days and nights to the unwilling sojourner in Kedesb, and thrice weary to them who so sadly missed his presence in the cottage home at Abdol. Spring came again with its bright sunshine, its verdure, its bursting buds and opening flowers, and its choruses of bird voices in forest and grove, still the work in forest and quarry and on Mount Moriah went on, and the Temple was well-nigh finished. But to Asher and his family these changes brought no lightness of heart. Within the walls of his chamber he pined for the ringing laugh of his children welcoming him home from his daily toil, for the music of the brook in his garden, for the shade of the spreading cedar and willow with the rustic seat beneath them, and with a yet more tender longing for the companionship of her who had so long looked well to the ways of his household, his faithful Bithiah. In his dreams he was with them; he found himself still an exile in a lone chamber. And yet he was not alone: the God of his father Jacob was with him, and he

remembered the dream of that patriarch when stretched on a ruder couch than his, and resting on a harder pillow. He remembered the ladder with its ascending and descending angels, and often did he pray that the earthward end might rest on his distant dwelling, and that unseen celestial visitants might traverse its rounds, cheering the hearts of the disconsolate with their errands of love.

The spring had almost melted into the fervent heats of summer, as Asher lay one night tossing on his restless couch and meditating on his Lebanon home. He was gazing through the opened lattice on a crescent moon, when an unwonted commotion was heard in the street, and the murmur of many voices became more and more audible to his ears. For some time he listened in vain to discern the cause of the excitement, but at last the explanation was given—to him a momentous one indeed—THE HIGH PRIEST WAS DEAD! Two days before, even as the smoke from the morning incense went up from the altar where he ministered, the angel of the Lord had called him from the outer courts of his house below to the inner chamber of the Temple on high.

Soon a solemn procession of Levites appeared, passing mournfully along the streets attired in garments of sack-cloth, and bare-foot. Every now and then they paused and engaged in solemn prayer, and accompanying the announcement of the decease with the proclamation that all the man-slayers in the city now, by the laws of Moses, were free to return to their own homes.

The heart of Asher gave one great bound at the thought that now he could with safety return to the loved ones at

home! He threw himself upon his knees and gave thanks, and prayed, with the multitude, that God would bless the house of Aaron. One day sufficed for his preparations for return. With what strange and painful interest did he mark every part of the road which under the saddest circumstances, he had once before traveled! The little bridge where he paused; the rocks which were now covered with verdure; the lambs on the heights above sporting by the side of the shepherd; the voice of the turtle sounding loud above the chorus of the singing birds which arose from the copse. The journey which, when a breathless fugitive, he performed in a few hours, now required more time. His strength was impaired by confinement, and fatigue compelled him to make frequent pauses. On attaining the extremity of the valley of Abdol he resolved to rest until the heat of the day was past. Reclining under a spreading tree, upon a grassy bank, his pilgrim staff beside him, he fell into a gentle slumber, and was dreaming of home and loved ones, when he was awakened by a gentle pressure upon his forehead. A figure bent over him—he opened his eyes, and one glance sufficed for recognition: His daughter Rachel rained kisses upon his brow and lips, and broken words were stammered forth, "my father! my father!" Leaning on his daughter's arm, the remainder of his journey was lightened, and soon he stood once more on his own threshold. We will not describe the meeting with his household—such scenes are to solemn for our pen. Suffice it to say that old Deborah was also there to greet him, and that with true Israelitish fervor, after the first gush of feeling was past, they all knelt down in thanks-

giving, and the burthen of the anthems to which their voices were attuned was:

"O, give thanks unto the Lord;
For he is good; for his mercy endureth forever!"

CHAPTER XI.

To the family of Asher, now happily re-united, time sped rapidly away. He was reinstated in his place as overseer of the workmen in Lebanon, whose labors were now drawing to a close. It was the sixth year since the work of erecting the Temple began, and one more season, it was thought, would complete the sacred edifice. To this time Asher looked with pleasing anticipations, for the favorable notice of his sovereign had been bestowed on him, and after the dedication he expected to receive the secrets of a Master workman from Hiram of Tyre, by which his position in the craft would be materially enhanced. He had served with freedom, fervency, and zeal; to him it was a labor of love to toil in erecting the House of the Lord, but yet he yearned for the mysterious knowledge of the Dyonisians of whom Hiram was chief. All those who should hold out faithful to the end of seven years had been promised this added knowledge, and all were eager to receive it. And while Asher thus lovingly labored and patiently waited for the completion of the Temple, how was it with Jahaz? By his turbulent con-

duct, as we have seen, he had lost his place among the craft; his scheme of revenge upon Asher had failed, he was an infidel to the Jewish faith, and the hand of every man seemed against him. Again he wended his way from Abdo to Jerusalem. The quiet pursuit of a herdsman did not suit him—he must meet again the turbulent spirits that he had associated with at the feast of the Passover, and who were as ripe for deeds of violence, and as eager for lawless pleasure as himself. As he passes within the city gates we lose sight of him—better had it been for him could he but have lost himself as easily and effectually as he now passes from our sight.

Slowly and quietly the summer time passed away, and winter following, gave place to spring. The heart of the nation beat with joy, for there remained but little labor to be done ere the Temple would be ready for the great day, the day of dedication. But who can tell what a day may bring forth? We go to our couches at night in the confident expectation that “to-morrow will be as this day, and much more abundant,” but to our eyes that morrow may never dawn. What a sad lesson of the mutability of life was that our ancient brethren learned on one bright spring day of this seventh year of the Temple! Yesterday they were in perfect order, to-day they are gathered in groups about the work, tumultuously discussing some subject of absorbing interest. The time draws nigh for the daily inspection of the work by the King, but none note the approach of the august monarch until with his body-guard he appears in their midst. Amazement and anger are manifest in his countenance. Calling to him the chief overseer

he demands in a voice of kingly authority:

“What is the cause of this confusion? Why are not the Craftsmen at work?”

Bowing his head upon his breast, and obsequiously kneeling, the overseer said:

“O, King live forever! Thy servants are idle because they have no work—there are no further designs laid down for them to work out.”

“No work—no designs!” exclaimed the King; “where then is your Master Hiram of Tyre?”

“He is not about the Temple, and thy servant has not seen him since yesterday. I fear he is ill at Bethany.”

At once the King dispatched a message to Hiram’s home. In due time he returned with intelligence that the Builder was not there, nor had they seen him since he left them at an early hour the day before. They supposed he had been detained on the King’s business, and were now filled with alarm. Instantly the King ordered strict search to be made in and about the Temple, but he could not be found, nor any trace of his whereabouts ascertained. Now thoroughly alive to the state of affairs, the King ordered each overseer to personally inspect his band of workmen. This done, it became painfully evident that Hiram of Tyre had been slain, for several suspicious characters were missing, and could not be found, while from others it appeared that a conspiracy had been entered into to extort the secret word of a Master from him or take his life.

The fell spirit of Jahaz had infused itself into a few of the most abandoned of the workmen, and they had waylaid the Master with the design of forcing from him the

secrets which their bad conduct rendered them unfit to hold. Firm in his integrity, he had resisted their attempt, and in their anger they slew him and fled! We need not enter into further description of this great catastrophe—suffice it to know that our ancient operative Grand Master was basely slain, and for a time the work on the Temple ceased. The murderers were finally captured, and confessing their crime, they were executed in the most ignominious manner possible. Then, with great pomp and august ceremonies, the body of our ancient Grand Master Hiram was disinterred, and borne from the lonely spot where they had hidden it to the city, where it received sepulture at the hands of the highest and noblest of the land. And then the work was resumed under the direction of other skillful hands and pushed forward to completion.

Reader, our tale is now told. It only remains for us to say that Asher received merited preferment, and leaving his cottage home on the slope of Lebanon, entered in the household service of King Solomon. In due time the solemn marriage rite made Elam and the daughter of Jobal of one flesh, and so, in peace and happiness we leave them to journey together down the declivity of life.