

The Story of the Woman of Shunem

Ps. xxxvii, 4.

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Psalms xxxvii, 4: Delight thyself
also in the Lord;
and He shall give thee the desires
of thy heart.

The fourth chapter of the second
book of the Kings contains a brief tale,
curious in its features, touching in
its pathos, & rich in instruction for
the heart of every one who would learn
to trust & rejoice in the grace of
the living God. It is

The Story of the Woman of Shunem.

Five hundred years before Christ
it happened, in the immediate neigh-
borhood of the city where He spent
His boyhood. ~~in the~~ Palestine was
not then, as now, a province of a
~~remote throne, yet in the portion of it with~~
~~great European power, tho' it was~~
~~which we are concerned, it was given over to~~
~~that portion of it, the north~~
~~idolatry, and~~
~~like the present, or at present given~~
~~over to idolatry, & ruled by a King~~
(Belshazzar)
who knew ~~less~~ less of the true God
than does its present Sultan.

~~Even thus does the sultan of the Turkish empire. The people did not know of Mohammed, but they the people worshipped a golden calf instead of Jehovah whom their fathers had honored; & were separated from the godlier portion of their race by the distinction of their kingdom, Israel, from the kingdom of Judah.~~

But here & there, as in every age of wickedness, there were left a few who had not departed from the true & ancient faith. One family dwells in the village of Shunem. It is called a city in the Bible, but I suppose that means

only such a city as ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} first age of the world; ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~born~~ ~~out~~ ~~of~~ ~~it~~ ~~could~~ ~~not~~ ~~have~~ ~~been~~ ~~very~~ ~~populous~~, ~~nor~~ ~~very~~ ~~large~~. Yet it lay in the midst of a beautiful region. Northward, its inhabitants ~~should~~ ~~look~~ might look up to the circular top of Mt. Ta-
 bor, ^{the boundary line which divides the country of} ~~from~~ ~~which~~ ^{from that summit} ~~is~~ ~~seen~~ ~~as~~ ~~beautiful~~ ~~branches~~ ~~from~~ ~~that~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~tribe~~ ~~of~~ ~~Zebulun~~ ~~to~~ ~~the~~ ~~north~~ a landscape as any in all that land which then flowed with milk & honey. ^{The village actually lay upon the slope of} ~~Southward~~ ~~lay~~ the mountain called Little Hermon; ~~flowing~~ ~~in~~ ~~Shunem~~; ^{trickled} to the west a little stream, fed by the springs which first brought Philistines to lay there the foundations of the town; it flowed out to the Jordan river ~~and~~ a little later the boundary between Israel & hated, cruel Syria. ~~There~~ Northward stretched the great

5- plain of Esdraelon, ^{full in sight from the hillsides} filled with
the finest cornfields in the world,
but memorable forever for more battles
than ~~perhaps~~ almost any place on
earth. There Barak destroyed Sisera;
Eideon overthrew the Amalekites &
Midianites (Judges vi, 33, vii, 1, 21); Josiah
of Judah was slain by Necho the Eyp-
tian (II K. xxiii, 29, II Chron. xxxv, 22); Ves-
pasian fought the Jews (Josephus),
the Remonders met the Saracens, &
the French in 1799 vanquished, alas!
but for a time! the Turks, whose
realm now includes the plain, but
greatest of all was that battle which
the Hebrew psalmist has celebrated,
where King Saul met his fate: the
mountain of Gilboa

Upon the slope of little Shunon ⁶
overlooking such a country, dwell
the women of Shunon. ^{add up.} ~~Her husband~~
~~As he were but - fearing souls, blessed~~
~~with a noble competence, & had in~~
~~repute among all who knew them.~~
But wealth cannot command all the
long desires of the heart & in that
~~domestic~~ ^{forgot} home, as in many another
~~that seemed less~~ where they may
have been carried, there was one abid-
ing sorrow. No good seemed for a woman
in Israel so great, as to be the joyful
mother of children (Ps. cxiii, 9; I Sam. ii, 5;
Isaiah liv, 1); for in the chosen nation
of God the domestic affections had
been awakened & preserved by the
mysterious promise that a child of

1 Abraham should be born in the
fullness of time who should be the
Savior of the world. The holier
the family, the more fervent this
desire; ~~as Hannah~~ the mother
of Samuel had prayed in the temple
at Jerusalem, ~~so this~~ doubtless this
believing woman, far away among
the idols of Samaria, had remem-
bered God's promise, & had desired
the crown of a mother's pride.

^{add p.} Her prayer was answered. It is ~~the~~ ^{an}
instruction of this narrative, that the
prayer of faith is heard and ans-
wered by Him who loveth all such
as trust in Him. Not in Shunem,
indeed, ~~that~~ in Nazareth, was the

8
~~Christ to be found; but this was
not the~~ ~~the child of~~
man's
but the humanites prayer should be
heard, & the face of God should fill
that house with joy.

Religion in those days was pre-
served by means strongly different
from the customs, or privileges, of
our times. There was not then, in
every hamlet, a church, or, as often
with us, two or three, sustained
by the voluntary contributions of an
~~the~~ intelligent population. The na-
tion was sunk in idolatry; the
first thing had abolished true reli-
gion, & the people were ignorant,
degraded, & idolatrous. Nor was there,

9 to preserve the remembrance of
God, a holy Bible. Printing was un-
known; ~~books were few, in the hands~~
~~only of the~~ there was no literature
such as we enjoy; the people had
no books; ~~even~~ the greater part of the
Bible was yet to exist, & even the
Law was probably forgotten. ~~These~~
~~how~~ Josiah found it, long, long
lost, in the temple at Jerusalem,
three hundred years later. These
were indeed the "dark ages" in
the northern states of Israel.

To keep alive the sacred flame
in the hearts of the few - 7000
they were in Elijah's time - who
at the will of all refused to bow the
knee to Baal, God who never leaves his

people altogether forsaken, had estab-¹⁰
lished in Israel an order of minis-
ters, the Prophets. Their office was
~~not~~ to witness, in the midst
of a wicked & a faithless generation,
the eternal power & godhead of ~~the~~
Israel's God. Their functions were
two: to declare future events,
which is what we usually under-
stand by the term prophecy; ~~also~~

this rather as ~~an~~ a divine aid
to their being received, than as
their main task; & also to testify
the will of God to men. ~~In the latter~~
this latter function is the one which
Isaiah prophesies to belong to us: "in the
last days, saith God, I will pour out My Spirit
upon all flesh; & your sons & your daughters shall
prophesy.... & also upon the servants & upon the
hand maids will I in those days pour out My Spirit."

" Elisha was the chief of the prophets
in the days of the woman of Shunem.
He was a busy, public man; unlike
his predecessor, going about among
the people continually; & in the chap-
ter of our theme he appears to have
been a sort of itinerant preacher of
God's truth. At all events, he was
accustomed to go from Samaria, the
capital, to Canaan, where may have
been gathered ~~at~~ at stated seasons,
congregations of the true Israelites.
At new moons & on Sabbaths, the
local congregation assembled to meet
him; & there, thro' long before the
institution of synagogues, they conducted
the exercises of a faithful worship.

Thro' Shunem was not on the direct
road from Samaria to Canaan,
Elisha appears to have pursued his
journey thro' that ~~former~~ town; &
on a certain day, ~~the~~ ~~fact~~ the
lady of the house invited him in
as he ~~was~~ ~~from~~ ~~passed~~ was passing.
The refreshment of religious converse
appears to have been as sweet to
that isolated family, as we often
now read, in the reports of mis-
sionaries or colporters ~~also~~ in
the new settlements in our western
territories, where the heat of life
is long removed from sanctu-
ary & all religious privileges. "Let us
make a room for this man of God,"

13 said she when husband & forthwith it was prepared. Upon the flat roof, if not against the blank front wall of the Oriental house, they constructed a small apartment; & there, as ~~the~~ ^{he} prophet journeyed to & fro, Elisha stopped.

The tie that binds our hearts in love was not unknown before the age of Xth; & Elisha, filled with gratitude for the constant hospitality of his friends, set about to show how he could ~~be~~ ^{had} made acknowledgments to them. He ~~turned over in his mind his~~ ^{had influence at the court} resources. ~~Verily, they were essentially~~ ^{ministerial.} He was not possessed of worldly goods to bestow; & yet he was a very rich man. He had sought above all

~~things the Kingdom of God & His right- 14
eousness, & in a sense all things were
practically added to him. What he had
not not cared to have.~~

These seemed to be ^{material} nothing of which his benefactors were in want; they were in that respect perhaps richer than he. But he has that influence among the great ones of the land which God is often pleased to give His servants ~~thru their use of His Spirit.~~ Elisha had ^{for he had not} ~~but~~ ^{Jehoram} recently done ~~the~~ King a great service in prophesying a rainfall; & he thinks to proffer the use of this advantage. ~~in the demanding~~ "Wouldest thou be spoken for to the King, or to the captain of the host?"

The Shunammite's reply is a great instruction. "I dwell among mine own people." She had no uneasy ambition beyond her Providential lot. She was one of the few of our

15
race who possess that spirit of
contentment which when governed by
godliness, is great gain. In a dark
& miserable age of the world; in an
isolations ^{& cruel} Kingdom; ~~retired even from~~
~~the centers~~ with only a dim
& ill-understood hope of the Saviour
who has brought such light & joy into
our era; ~~secluded, humble, she~~
this enviable woman seems to have
had nothing to ask, & enough to enjoy.

~~But Elisha, the servant, com-~~
manded to inquire, quickly observed,
that the national hope had in
that home nothing to feed upon. There
was there no child of promise. ~~But~~
~~Elisha, the prophet of God,~~
~~But Elisha, observing that~~
~~childless home, prophesied to his~~
~~friends that God would send them~~

~~a blessing which should fill their~~ 16
~~hearts with joy.~~

But Elisha, observing that childless
home, & knowing the will of God, pro-
phesied a divine gift which should
bring a new song to the ~~benef~~ mouths
of his friends.

~~Of how great happiness, there, is the~~
~~contented mind capable!~~