

"A Little Maid;"

or, Faithfulness in Obscurity.

2 Kings 5: 2-4.

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There was nothing novel about the history of this little maid. Her lot was common to thousands in those hard cruel days of inter-tribal warfare. Uprooted violently from the midst of home and loved ones by the savage enemies of her country she found herself a humble captive in the house of the conquering general.

"The Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife."

There in few words you have her pitiful story from the pen of the inspired historian. She is not named. Who would expect her to be? A little slave in a foreign land, alone and friendless, one's only wonder would be that in the Book of books she should be mentioned at all.

It was, indeed, through an exclamation that fell from her lips that Naaman first heard of a cure for his leprosy. But even so, that fact would hardly seem to be of sufficient importance to merit such notice.

Yet it is noticed, and that in an emphatic way.

"And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel."

Her very words are carefully noted by the Spirit of God. They have an importance beyond that which appears at first sight.

Let us not be surprised at this. Have we not seen in Scripture again and again that it is the insignificant instruments that God uses, the unexpected servants by whom He does great things? And not only this; do we not find oftentimes the rarest qualities and graces expressing themselves in the poorest, the humblest, and most retired of His people?

We certainly do. One of the poets has told us that

"Full many a gem of purest ray serene
The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear:
Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,

And waste its sweetness on the desert air."

We may well appropriate these beautiful lines to spiritual things, only remembering that no hidden flower that God cultivates in this desert-world wastes its sweetness. If such are not appreciated by men their sweetness is a joy to the heart of their Father and God.

Just such a flower as that was the little captive maid.

Quietly consider her story and see if three most excellent virtues do not lie enwrapped in it.

1. She was possessed with THE MOST SUBLIME CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

Without any misgiving she announces a fact "He would recover him of his leprosy."

How did she know it so positively? Who told her that?

She could not argue from precedent and say that what she had seen done once might be done again. There was no precedent to argue from! The cleansing of a leper was an unknown thing in the land of Israel in those days. For saying this we have the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth He said:

"I tell you of a truth . . . many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian" (Luke 4: 25-7).

Here, then, is a very extraordinary thing! A young girl confidently asserts that if her heathen master, who had fought against and ravaged the people of God, will only go to the prophet of the great JEHOVAH, he shall be miraculously delivered from the grip of the most deadly of diseases; yet she can produce no tangible warrant for so asserting, she cannot even cite *one* case of a professed follower of Jehovah being so delivered. Which is it? Preposterous folly or sublime faith?

That must have been the question debated in the ranks of Israel when David descended into the valley of Elah to meet Goliath. The issue of the conflict soon decided the question for them. Men may hoot with derision while faith is calmly marching to her goal. They stand all amazed or shout with applause when her unexpected triumph is won.

So too with the little maid. Her words were amply vindicated in the end. The issue of them was crowned with success. It was not folly, it was faith.

Her faith in God was like a diamond of the finest water. It rested not upon human arguments. It found no support in human circumstances. It transcended human reason. It just soared aloft with eagle wings to lay hold upon GOD Himself, and there it rested. She evidently believed in the *power* and the *compassions* of God. From that she drew her inspiration, so that, laughing at the impossible, she was able to say, "It shall be done."

2. She manifested THE MOST SUBLIME COURAGE in TESTIMONY.

"Add to your faith virtue [or *courage*]" is an apostolic command (1 Peter 1: 5). This the little maid anticipated and obeyed. To have such confidence in the power and grace of God as to feel sure that, in the teeth of all experience and appearances, He will bless and deliver an enemy if only he seeks Him, is one thing. To boldly and confidently assert one's inward confidence and convictions is quite another.

Put yourself in the shoes of the little maid and think what it meant. In similar circumstances

would you not have said:

1. "They have no confidence in Jehovah. My assertions will seem incredible. I shall but be laughed at for my words."

2. "May they not misinterpret my words and my motives? Will they not think it an artful scheme to decoy Naaman in a defenceless condition into the land of Israel that vengeance may be wreaked on him?"

3. "Supposing that for some obscure reason which I do not understand Jehovah is not pleased to cure Naaman, with what anger and rage he will return! How absurd he will look to the public! A great man fooled and sent on a wild-goose chase by a little girl! In such case he will wreak vengeance on me! My life will not be worth ten minutes' purchase! I quite believe God will cure him by His prophet, but — *No*. It will be more prudent if I hold my tongue."

We could, in fact, have doubtless found many reasons why we should not take our courage with both hands and boldly declare that which we knew of God. The little maid was proof against such considerations.

What was it that nerved her for such bold witness? The answer seems to lie upon the surface of the scripture.

3. She was moved by THE MOST SUBLIME COMPASSION FOR THE LOST.

The manner and tone of her utterance shows it. Here is Naaman — the hereditary foe of her people, the indirect cause, at least, of her captivity, and the news filters down to her ears that he is a lost man, doomed to a loathsome death. Is she filled with ill-concealed satisfaction? Does she exult at the thought of a miserable end overtaking him? Not at all.

See her stand before her mistress. Note the tear-drop of pity in her eye. How those words spring from the tender fountain of her heart and burst the portals of her lips: "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Coldness and cynicism were absent, warmth and the ring of reality were there!

Lifted above all petty motives of revenge, her compassion was no less sublime than the strength of her confidence in God or the courage with which she witnessed to Him. It was indeed more than sublime. It was positively *divine*. Like David's kindness to Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 9: 3), her kindness too "was the kindness of *God*." In words and behaviour she strikingly displayed the good and gracious character of the God she served.

Well done, little maid! In very trying circumstances you performed that most high and holy service of rightly representing Him with whose name you were identified. The greatest of God's servants cannot do more than this.

Your reward is on high. Naaman *may* have thanked you on his return or he *may not*. But even if no word nor look of recognition were ever given you by man, you did not "waste your sweetness on the desert air." The fragrance of your words and spirit was fully appreciated by your God, and you will hear from the lips of ANOTHER, Himself the *perfect* Servant, the words "Well done!" in that day.

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There is an application to the story of the little maid. It does not require great mental acuteness to see it. For himself or herself let each reader make it.

The day in which we live has its own peculiar testings, and, in spite of the thin veneer of Christianity which Christendom carries, never was living faith in God at a lower ebb. Yet God Himself stands revealed to faith in a way in which He did not in Naaman's day.

God perfectly revealed to us in Christ should certainly inspire us with the strongest confidence in Himself. The Holy Spirit given since the day of Pentecost to us as believers should fill us with courage, for "greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world" (1 John 4: 4); and further, God has said, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13: 5, 6). Lastly we have been saved that we may be in communion with the mind of the Saviour and display His character before the world; putting on "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies [bowels of *compassion*, N.T.], kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering" (Col. 3: 12).

Life's path for many of us may lead into shade and retirement. Let none of us lose heart because of obscurity. In your small corner you may brightly shine for Christ, since

"The God that lived in Naaman's time

Is just the same today!"