

THE MASK OF DECEIT

"WHY FEIGNEST THOU THYSELF TO BE ANOTHER?"

Rev. Dr. Talmage Draws Some Startling Lessons from a Unique Text—Royalty in Disguise—The Accuracy of God's Providence in the Universe.

Our Washington Pulpit.

In this sermon from a Bible scene never used in sermonic discourse Dr. Talmage draws some startling lessons and tears off the mask of deceit. The text is I. Kings xiv, 6. "Why feignest thou thyself to be another?"

In the palace of wicked Jeroboam there is a sick child—a very sick child. Medicines have failed; skill is exhausted. Young Abijah, the prince, has lived long enough to become very popular, and yet he must die unless some supernatural aid be afforded. Death comes up the broad stairs of the palace and swings back the door of the sick room of royalty and stands looking at the dying prince with the dark uplifted. Wicked Jeroboam knows that he has no right to ask anything of the Lord in the way of kindness. He knows that his prayers would not be answered, and so he sends his wife on the delicate and tender mission to the prophet of the Lord in Shiloh. Putting aside her royal attire, she puts on the garb of a peasant woman and starts on the road. Instead of carrying gold and gems as she might have carried from the palace, she carries only those gifts which seem to indicate that she belongs to the peasant—a few loaves of bread and a few cracknels and a cruse of honey. Young she goes hooded and veiled, the greatest beauty in all the kingdom, yet goes unobserved. No one that meets her on the highway has any idea that she is the first lady in all the land. She is a queen in disguise.

The fact is that Peter the Great working in the dry docks of St. Petersburg, the sailor's hat and the shipwright's ax gave him no more thought than the mask of the peasant woman did to the queen of Tirzah. But the prophet of the Lord saw the deceit. Although his physical eyesight had failed, he was divinely illumined, and at one glance looked through the imposition, and he cried out: "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam! Why feignest thou thyself to be another? I have evil tidings for thee. Get thee back to thy house, and when thy feet touch the gate of the city the child shall die." She had a right to ask for the recovery of her son; she had no right to practice an imposition. Broken hearted now, she started on the way, the tears falling on the dust of the road all the way from Shiloh to Tirzah. Broken hearted now, she is not careful any more to hide her queenly gait and manner. True to the prophecy, the moment her feet touch the gate of the city the child goes out. She cry in the palace of the child is joined by the lamentation of a nation, and as they carry good Abijah to his grave the air is filled with the voice of eulogy for the departed youth and the groan of an afflicted kingdom.

A Thrilling Story.

It is for no insignificant reason that I present you the thrilling story of the text. In the first place I learn that wickedness involves others, trying to make them its dupes, its allies and its scapegoats. Jeroboam proposed to hoodwink the Lord's prophet. How did he do it? Did he go and do the work himself? No. He sent his wife to do it. Hers the peril of exposure, hers the fatigues of the way, hers the execution of the plot; his, nothing. Iniquity is a brat, but it is a great coward. It lays the plan and gets some one else to execute it; puts down the gunpowder train and gets some one else to touch it off; contrives mischief and gets some one else to work it; starts a lie and gets some one else to circulate it. In nearly all the great crimes of the world it is found out that those who planned the arson, the murder, the theft, the fraud, go free, while those who were decoyed and cheated and hoodwinked into the conspiracy link the chain and mount the gallows.

Aaron Burr, with heart filled with impurity and ambition, lots for the overthrow of the United States Government and gets off with a few threats and a little censure, while Blennerhassett, the learned Blennerhassett, the sweet-tempered Blennerhassett, is decoyed by him from the orchards, and the laboratories and the gardens, and the home on the bank of the Ohio river, and his fortunes are scattered, and he is thrown into prison, and his family, brought up in luxury, is turned out to die. Abominable Aaron Burr had it comparatively easy. Sweet-tempered Blennerhassett has it hard. Benedict Arnold proposed to sell out the forts of the United States; to surrender the Revolutionary Army and to destroy the United States Government. He gets off with his pockets full of pounds sterling, while Major Andre, the brave and the brilliant, is decoyed into the conspiracy and suffers on the gibbet on the banks of the Hudson; so that even the literature—the marble tablature that commemorated that event—has been blasted by midnight desperadoes. Benedict Arnold has it easy. Major Andre has it hard. I have noticed that nine-tenths of those who suffer for crimes are merely the satellites of some great and terrible and inimical fraud is a jugger which by slight of hand and leg-endian makes the gold that it stole appear in somebody else's pocket. Jeroboam plots the lie, contrives the imposition, and gets his wife to execute it. Stand off from all imposition and chicanery. Do not consent to be anybody's dupe, anybody's ally in wickedness, anybody's scapegoat.

The story of the text also impresses me with the fact that royalty sometimes passes in disguise. The frock, the veil, the hood of the peasant woman bid the queenly character of this woman of Tirzah. Nobody suspected that she was a queen or a princess as she passed by, but she was just as much a queen as though she stood in the palace, her robes incrusted with diamonds. And so all around about us there are princesses and queens whom the world does not recognize. They sit on throne of royalty, they ride in no chariot, they elicit no huzzas, they make no pretense, but by the grace of God they are princesses and they are queens; sometimes in their poverty, sometimes in their self-denial, sometimes in their hard struggles of Christian service—God knows they are queens. The world does not recognize them.

Royalty passing in disguise, kings without the crown, conquerors without the palm, emperors without the jewel. You saw her yesterday on the street. You saw nothing important in her appearance, but she is regnant over a vast realm of virtue and goodness—a realm vaster than Jeroboam ever looked in. You went down into the house of despotism and want and suffering. You saw the story of trial written on the wasted hand of the mother on the pale cheeks of the children, on the empty bread tray, on the fireless hearth, on the broken chair. You would not have given a dollar for all the furniture in the house. But by the grace of God she is a princess. The overseers of the poor come there and discuss the case and say, "It's a pauper." They do not realize that God has furnished her for a crown, and that after she has got through the fatiguing journey from Tirzah to Shiloh and from Shiloh back to Tirzah, there will be a throne of royalty on which she shall rest forever. Glory veiled. Affluence hidden.

Eternal raptures bashed up. A queen in mask. A princess in disguise.

The Queen in Disguise. When you think of a queen of a nation, do you not think of Catherine of Russia, or Maria Theresa of Germany, or Mary, queen of Scots. When you think of a queen, you think of a plain woman who sat opposite your father at the table or walked with him down the path of life arm in arm, sometimes to the grave, but always side by side, soothing your little sorrows and adjusting your little quarrels, listening to your evening prayer, toiling with the needle or at the spinning wheel, and on cold nights tucking you up snug and warm. And then on that dark day when she lay a-dying, putting those thin hands that had held for so long, putting them together in a dying prayer commanding you to that God in whom she had taught you to trust. Oh, she was the queen, she was the queen! You cannot think of her now without haying the deepest emotions of your soul stirred, and you feel as if you could cry as though you were now sitting in infancy on her lap, and if you could call "Mama" back to speak your name with the tenderness with which she once spoke you would be willing now to throw yourself on the sod that covers her grave, crying, "Mother, mother!" Ah, she was the queen! Your father knew it. You knew it. She was the queen, but the queen in disguise.

I am no fatalist, but I should be completely wretched if I did not feel that all the affairs of my life are in God's hand and all that pertains to me and mine, just as certainly as all the affairs of this woman of the text, as this child of the text, as this king of the text, were in God's hand. You may ask me a hundred questions I cannot answer, but I shall until the day of my death believe that I am under the care of God, and the heavens may fall, and the world may burn, and the judgment may thunder, and eternal ages may roll, but not a hair of my head will be harmed. The sun shall drop down on my path, not a sorrow shall transfix my heart without being divinely arranged—arranged by a loving sympathetic Father. He bottles out our tears, he catches our sorrows, and to the orphan he will be a Father, and to the widow he will be a husband, and to the outcast he will be a home, and to the most miserable wretch that this day crawls up out of the ditch of his abomination crying for mercy he will be an all pardoning God. The rocks shall turn gray with age, and the forests shall be unmoored in the last hurricane, and the sun shall sift its fiery eyelid, and the stars shall drop like blasted figs, and the continents shall go down like anchors in the deep, and the ocean shall heave its last groan and lash itself with expiring agony, and the world shall wrap itself in a winding sheet of flame and leap on the funeral pyre of the judgment day; but God's love shall not die. It will kindle its suns after all other lights have gone out. It will be a billowy sea after the last ocean has swept itself away. It will warn itself by the fire of a consuming world. It will sing while the archangel's trumpet is pealing forth and the air is filled with the crash of broken sepulchers and the rush of the wings of the rising dead. Oh, may God comfort all this people with this Christian sentiment!

My subject also impresses me with how precise and accurate and particular are God's prophecies. Just at the moment that woman entered the city the child died. Just as it was prophesied, so it turned out, so it always turns out. The event occurs, the death takes place, the nation is born, the despotism is overthrown at the appointed time. God drives the universe with a stiff rein. Events do not just happen so. Things do not go slippish. In all the book of God's prophecies there is not one "if." God's prophecies are never caught in disharmony. To God there are no surprises, no disappointments and no accidents. The most insignificant event flung out in the ages is the connecting link between two great chains—the chain of eternity past and the chain of eternity to come.

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Short Sermons.

The Nation's Need.—The church's opportunity is to supply the nation's need by preaching Christ as the savior of society as well as of the individual. Also, to practice his teachings and obey his law in the world. We pray for millennial days; we shall hasten them when in business, social and political life we do the pleasure of the King. The world's standard of business is wrong, and our social caste is heathenish, not Christian.—Rev. J. K. Montgomery, Presbyterian, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Church Work.—The church attracts to it persons who are themselves attracted, and repels those who have nothing to do. Christ never sought any one.

I know that that happened Christ owned all the olive groves and all the harvests which shooed their gold on the hills of Palestine. No one knew that he said "I thirst!" poured the Euphrates out of his own chalice. No one knew that he freed the shackled demoniac of Gadara, as when he turned a whole school of fish into the net of the disengaged boatmen, as when he throbbed life into the shrivelled arm of the paralytic, but for the most part he was in disguise. No one saw the King's jewels in his sandal. No one saw the royal robe in his plain coat. No one knew that that shelterless Christ owned all the mansions in which the hierarchs of heaven had their habitation. None knew that that hungry Christ owned all the olive groves and all the harvests which shooed their gold on the hills of Palestine. No one knew that he said "I thirst!" poured the Euphrates out of his own chalice. 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