

DECETT.

It is an Abomination in the Sight of God.

Sooner or Later the Mask Will be Torn Off—It is Never Right to Do Wrong—The Story of Jeroboam.

In the following sermon on the sin of the ancient king Jeroboam Dr. Talmage draws some very pointed and useful lessons. His text was I. Kings, 14:16: "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 dart 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 peasantry—a few loaves of bread and a few cracknels and a crust of honey. Yonder she goes, hooded and veiled, the greatest lady in all the kingdom, yet passing 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 Saardam, the sailor's hat and the shipwright's ax, gave him no more thorough disguise than the garb of the peasant woman gave 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 imposture, 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 imposture. 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 touched the gate of the city the child died. As she goes in, the soul of the child goes out. The cry in the palace 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.

It is for no insignificant purpose 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 fatigue of the way, hers the execution of the plot. His nothing. Iniquity is a brag, but it is a great coward. It lays the plan, gets someone else to execute it—puts down the gunpowder train, gets some one else to touch it off—contrives mischief, gets some one else to work it—starts a lie, 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, clank the chain and mount the gallows.

Aaron Burr, with heart filled with impurity and ambition, plots 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 has it comparatively easy; sweet-tempered Blennerhassett has it hard. Benedict Arnold proposed to sell out the Revolutionary army, and to destroy the United States government. He gets off with his pockets full of pounds sterling, while Maj. 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 tablet that commemorated that event has been blasted by midnight desperadoes. Benedict Arnold has it easy; Maj. Andre has it hard. I have noticed that nine-tenths of those who suffer for crimes are merely the satellites of some great villains. Ignominious fraud is a juggler which by sleight of hand and ledgerman makes the gold that it stole appear in somebody else's pocket. Jeroboam plots the lie, contrives the imposture, and gets his wife to execute it. Stand off from all imposture 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 hid 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 incrustated with diamonds. And so all around about us there are princesses and queens

whom the world does not recognize. They sit on no 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, empresses with 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 at.

You went down into the house of destitution 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 punished for her 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 hushed up. A queen in mask. A princess in disguise.

When you think of a queen you do not think of Catharine 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 Thanksgiving banquet, 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 the dark day when she lay a dying, putting those thin hands that had toiled for you so long, putting them together in a dying prayer commending 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 having 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 call her 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. The world did not recognize it.

But there was a grander disguising. The favorite of a great house looked out of the window of his palace and he saw that the people were carrying heavy burdens, and that some of them were hobbling on crutches, and he saw some lying at the gate exhibiting their sores, and then he heard their lamentation, and he said: "I will just put on the clothes of those poor people, and I will go down and see what their sorrows are, and I will sympathize with them, and I will be one of them, and I will help them."

Well, the day came for Him to start. The lords of the land came to see Him off. All who could sing joined in the parting song, which shook the hills and woke up the shepherds. The first few nights He has been sleeping with the hostlers and the camel drivers, for no one knew there was a king in town. He went among the doctors of the law, astounding them; for without any doctor's gown, He knew more law than the doctors. He fished with the fishermen. He snote with his own hammer in the carpenter's shop. He ate raw corn out of the field. He fried fish on the banks of Gennesaret. He was howled at by crazy people in the tombs. He was splashed of the surf of the sea. A pilgrim without any pillow. A sick man without any medicament. A mourner with no sympathetic bosom in which He could pour His tears. Disguise complete. I know that occasionally His divine royalty flashed out, as when in the storm on Galilee, as in the red wine at the wedding banquet, as when He freed the shackled demoniac of Gadara, as when He turned a whole school of fish into the net of the discouraged boatmen, as when He throbbed life into the shriveled arm of the paralytic; but for the most part He was in disguise. No one saw the king's jewels in His sandals. 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 hungered Christ owned all the olive groves, and all the harvests which shook their gold on the hills of Palestine. No one knew that He who said "I thirst" poured the Euphrates out of His own chalice. No one knew that the ocean lay in the palm of his hand like a dewdrop in the vase of a lily. No one knew that the stars, and moons, and suns, and galaxies, and constellations that marched on age after age were, as compared with His lifetime, the sparkle of a frety on a summer night. No one knew that the sun in mid-heaven was only the shadow of His throne. No one knew that His crown of universal dominion was covered up with a bunch of thorns. Omniscience sheathed in a human body. Omniscience hidden in a human eye. Infinite love beating in a human heart. Everlasting harmonies subdued into a human voice. Royalty en masque. Grandeur of Heaven in earthly disguise.

My subject also impresses me with how people put on masks, and how the Lord tears them off. It was a terrible moment in the history of this woman of Tirzah when the prophet accosted her, practically saying: "I know who you are; you cannot cheat me, you cannot impose upon me; why feignest thou thyself to be another?" She had a right to ask for the restoration of her son; she had no right to practice that

falsehood. It is never right to do wrong. Sometimes you may be able to conceal an affair; it is not necessary to tell everything. There is a natural pressure to the lips which seems to indicate that silence sometimes is right, but for double dealing, for moral shuffling, for counterfeit, and for sham God has nothing but anathema and exposure. He will tear off the lie. He will rip up the empiricism. He will scatter the ambushes. There are people who are just ready to be duped. They seem to be waiting to be deceived. They believe in ghosts; they saw one themselves once. They heard something strange in an uninhabited house.

Going along the road one night, something approached them in white and crossed the road. They would think it very disastrous to count the number of carriages at a funeral. They heard in a neighbor's house something that portended death in the family. They say it is a sure sign of evil if a bat fly into the room on a summer night, or they see the moon over the left shoulder. They would not for the world undertake any enterprise on Friday, forgetful of the fact that if they look over the calendar of the world they will see that Friday has been the most fortunate day in all the history of the world.

As near as I can tell, looking over the calendar of the world's history, more grand, bright, beautiful things have happened on Friday than any other day of the week. They would not begin anything on Friday. They would not for the world go back to the house for anything after they had once started. Such people are ready to be duped. Ignorance comes along, perhaps in the disguise of medical science, and carries them captive; for there are always some men who have found some strange and mysterious weed in some strange place, and plucked it in the moonshine, and then they cover the board fences with the advertisements of "elixir," and "panaceas," and "Indian mixtures," and "ineffable cataplasms," and "unfailing disinfectants," and "lightning salves," and "instantaneous ointments," enough to stun and scarry and poultice and kill half the race. They are all ready to be wrought upon by such impostures. Ah! my friends, do not be among such dupes. Do not act the part of such persons as I have been describing. Stand back from all chicanery, from all imposture. They who practice such imposture shall be exposed in the day of God's indignation. They may rear great fortunes, but their dapple gray will be arrested on the roadside of God, as was the ass by the angel of the last day with drawn sword. The light of the last day will shine through all such subterfuges, and with a voice louder than that which accosted this imposture of the text: "Come in, thou wife of Jeroboam; why feignest thou thyself to be another?"—with a voice louder than that, God will thunder down into midnight darkness and doom and death all two-faced men, and all charlatans, and all knaves, and all jockeys, and all swindlers. Behold how the people put on the masks, and behold how the Lord tears them off!

My subject also impresses me with how precise and accurate and particular are God's providences. Just at the moment that woman entered the city, the child died. Just as it was prophesied, so it turned 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 slipshod. In all the book of God's providence there is not one "if." God's providences are never caught in dishabille. 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. 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 hands, 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 hands.

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 unerring 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 shall fall from my head, not a shadow shall drop on my path, not a sorrow shall transfix my heart without being divinely arranged—arranged by a loving, sympathetic Father. He bottles 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 shut up his 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 billion sea after the last ocean has wept itself away. It will warm 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 sepulchres and the rush of the wings of the rising dead. Oh, may God comfort all this people with this Christian sentiment.

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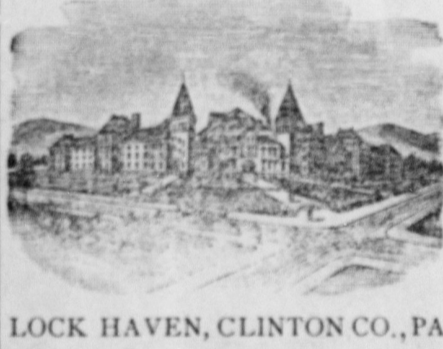
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