

***EDWARD
B. POLLARD***



***ORIENTAL
WOMEN***

Edward B. Pollard

Oriental Women

EAN 8596547333081

DigiCat, 2022

Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

I

WOMEN OF THE DAWN

II

ISRAEL'S HEROIC AGE

III

THE DAYS OF THE KINGS

IV

THE ERA OF POLITICAL DECLINE

V

THE BABYLONIAN AND ASSYRIAN WOMEN

VI

THE LAND OF THE LOTUS

VII

THE WOMEN OF THE HINDOOS

VIII

BESIDE THE PERSIAN GULF

IX

THE WOMEN OF ARABIA

X

THE TURKISH WOMEN

XI

THE MOORISH WOMEN

XII

WOMEN OF CHINA AND COREA

XIII

UNDER THE CHERRY BLOSSOMS

THE WOMEN OF JAPAN

XIV

WOMEN OF THE BACKWARD RACES OF THE EAST

PREFACE

[Table of Contents](#)

The relative position which woman occupies in any country is an index to the civilization which that country enjoys, and this test applied to the Orient reveals many stages yet to be achieved. The frequent appearance of woman in Holy Writ is sufficient evidence of the high position accorded her in the Hebrew nation. Such characters as Ruth, Esther, and Rebekah have become famous. Wicked women there were, such as Jezebel, but happily their influence was not of lasting duration. No other ancient people so highly prized chastity in woman; motherhood was regarded as an evidence of divine favor, while barrenness was considered a curse. The home life was one of singular purity and sweetness. Idleness was deplored as a crime, and every child was taught to work with his own hands.

The deities of the Babylonians and Assyrians were feminine as well as masculine. Ishtar was the Venus of classical mythology--the goddess of love, and the Babylonian Hades was presided over by a feminine deity. Rank, however, determined social freedom; the woman of the lowest class might go and come at will, but the woman of the high class was condemned to a life of isolation. Woman's position of honor in Egypt is evidenced by the presence of temples and monuments erected to her memory. She assisted her husband in the management of his affairs, and was granted a part in religious worship.

In the countries in which Brahmanism and Mohammedanism is the prevailing religion, the position of

woman is relatively low. The Hindoo woman has no spiritual life apart from her husband; she can only hope for ultimate happiness through a union with him. The harem prevails, and woman is the slave of man.

In contrast to the position of woman in these countries and in China is the position she holds in Japan. While not yet occupying a place of respect equal to that accorded her in the Occident, she is coming gradually to be regarded as she deserves. There yet remain the loose morals, characteristic of the Oriental nature, and it is still regarded as right and proper that a good wife should barter her chastity if it is necessary in order to save her husband the disgrace of imprisonment for debt. The higher classes, however, are coming to treat woman with a respect far higher than that usually accorded her in the Orient. The process of her elevation must of necessity be slow, for no great reform is accomplished by a *coup d'état*, but only through the ameliorating effects of enlightenment and education, and this alone will accomplish the final emancipation of the woman of the Orient from her present condition of servitude.

E. B. POLLARD.

I

WOMEN OF THE DAWN

[Table of Contents](#)

The story of the first woman in the Hebrew Scriptures and Semitic myth is as familiar as a household tale. Jewish and Christian literature alike have frequent mention of the part she played in the race's infancy, though in the sacred writings themselves she is but rarely mentioned.

What the Book of Genesis furnishes upon the creation of the first woman may not be considered of great interest as a scientific treatise upon the first appearance of feminine life on the earth, but it is of marked importance as revealing the idea around which the life and character of the Hebrew woman were developed. Here we find a pure monotheism (the presence of no goddess at the birth of things), a high morality, the dignity of marriage and of motherhood, that give to the Hebrew women great advantage over their sisters of many another country.

Very early was it discovered, say the Hebrew records, that it is "not good for man to be alone." The method by which this fact was first made manifest is of no little suggestiveness. Would it be possible from the many creatures of earth, sky, and sea, already made, for man to find a companion in whom he might confide, with whom the long hours might be made more joyous? God tries the man whom he has made. Could he be satisfied with a creature of a lower order as fellow and friend? Could he, by subduing and having dominion, find in dog, camel, or favorite steed a sufficient helpfulness, a satisfaction for his human longings? No! As one by one the living creatures passed in solemn order before him, it was soon realized by the names that Adam gave them, that he found no true fellowship in all that earth-born throng. "And the man gave names to all cattle

and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for man there was not found an helpmeet for him."

The epoch-making "deep sleep" that fell upon Adam, the taking of the rib, the making of the first woman, the closing again of the wound, and the presentation of a helpmeet for the man--all this is a familiar Scripture story. Whether it be intended to be literal history is of little moment here. Very beautifully have Matthew Henry and others, following the rabbis, commented upon the essential meaning of this narrative in suggesting that woman is not represented as taken from the head of man that she should rule over him; nor from his feet, to be trampled under foot; but she was taken from his side that she might be his equal; from under his arm that she might be protected by him; near his heart that he might cherish and love her. "This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called *Ishshah*"--that is, if man is to be called *Ish*, woman shall be *Ishshah*, simply his equal.

It is not strange that there should have arisen many legends about this first Oriental woman. According to one of the Jewish stories contained in the Talmud, Adam was at first very huge. When he stood, his head reached to the very heavens; and when he reclined, he covered the earth with his gigantic form. But in a deep sleep which God caused to fall upon him, Eve was made from parts of all his members. After the creation of Eve, therefore, Adam was never again quite so large. Some of the Jewish rabbis taught that Adam, the first man, had in his body thirteen ribs,--one more than was possessed by any of his descendants,--and

that this surplus bone became, in the hands of the Creator, the physical basis for the creation of the mother of all.

The thought has been suggested that as man was commissioned to subdue and have dominion over the beasts of the field and all the forces of Nature, the reason for woman's creation lies in her ability to *tame man*. Whether this be true or not, the student of Hebrew history will not lack ample evidence to show that to the women of Israel is due largely the place that their people hold in history as teachers of religion and morals; to them is due, also, that conservative quality which has made the Hebrews a peculiar and permanent people.

One of the old rabbis, commenting upon the Biblical account of woman's creation from the rib of Adam, remarked: "It is as if Adam had changed a pot of earth for a jewel." Good Dr. South, of pious memory, unaffected by the modern views of development, is credited with the remark that "Aristotle was but the rubbish of an Adam." If this be true, what must Eve have been!

About the beauty of the first woman, the Scriptures are silent, though, in *Paradise Lost*, Milton finds no hesitancy in creating her with surpassing physical grace, so that it was possible for her, like Narcissus, to fall in love with her own charms. Poets have not been slow to sing her praises:

"The world was sad, the garden was a wild
And man the hermit sighed, till woman smiled."

The Hebrews called the first woman Eve--that is, *living* or *expanded*, "the mother of all living." But these Oriental records attribute to Eve the advent into the world of death

and human woes. The discord that came from the apple once tossed into a famous company of frolicking Greeks cannot compare with that which grew out of the fatal fruit, forbidden to the primal tenants of the Garden of Eden.

"Earth felt the wound--And Nature from her seat
Sighing through all her works, gave sign of woe,
That all was lost."

The French saying *cherchez la femme* has been in some form upon the lips of men from the earliest dawn of time. "The woman which thou gavest me," is Adam's lame apology for his weakness, as in one brief sentence he shifts the blame with dexterity upon God--the giver,--and woman--the God-given.

In marked contrast with this dark view of the first woman's legacy to the world is the account of the first promise, the light that burst forth suddenly as through a rift in the overshadowing cloud: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head." Thus Lamartine's remark that "woman is at the beginning of all great things," becomes as pertinent as it is true. It is impossible to estimate the effect upon Israelitish motherhood of the belief in that ancient promise that some mother's son should yet arise to crush the monster of evil that was loosed in the world. Many a Hebrew mother came to feel that her own babe might become the hero chosen to strangle the serpent. This thought made motherhood the more prized, it became the aim of every Hebrew woman.

What if we could reproduce the sensations of that mother-love when the first woman enfolded in her bosom

the first infant born, and heard its first cry for a mother's care? Of much interest is the Hebrew narrative here; for when Eve beheld her firstborn son she is said to have made an exclamation which many Hebrew scholars interpret as meaning, "I have obtained the promised One," believing that the pledge of Jehovah concerning the woman's seed had even then been realized. But the first son was to bring pangs to his mother's soul by slaying the first brother. Who can adequately describe the effect which that first death must have had upon the maternal heart? Instead of the lost Abel came a new son to console the mother-heart, Seth, the good; and the struggle between good and evil goes on throughout the Hebrew records, woman usually taking her place with the forces that made for righteousness.

Concerning the first bad woman, Lilith, held by some to have been the wife of the first man, very curious are the legends. Later rabbinic literature is rife with these stories. Among the Babylonians and Assyrians, Lilith was a *night-fairy*, as the derivation of the name would indicate, though some derive it from *lilu*, the wind. Popular superstition among the Hebrews, either through inheritance from the early days before Abraham, their father, lived in the Mesopotamian valley, or through the contacts with this region during the Babylonian exile, looked upon Lilith as a female demon of the night. She was supposed to be especially hostile to children, and this is why the Latin translations of the Vulgate version of the Scriptures rendered the word as *lamia*, a hag or witch who was supposed to be harmful to the little folk--though grown up people, also, might well beware of her baneful power. She is

mentioned but once in Scriptures, and then in that highly graphic portrayal by the prophet Isaiah concerning the coming desolation that should soon befall the land of Edom, which was to become a place where "the wild beasts of the deserts meet with the wolves, and the satyr cries to his fellows, and *Lilith* (rendered in the accepted version, *Screech Owl*, and in the later version, *Night Monster*) takes up her abode."

It is Lilith's earlier history that is of especial interest, for, as runs the Jewish legend which one often meets in Talmudic literature, Lilith was the first wife of Adam, but becoming angered, she flew away and became a demon of the night. But the world will probably never concede that the first woman was a wicked one. The subtlety of an evil woman's charms is probably the underlying motive of the story of this "sweet snake of Eden," of whom Rossetti, in his *Eden Bower*, affirms consolingly, "not a drop of her blood was human."

"Who was Cain's wife?" is one of the perplexing questions asked by those who delight in hard sayings. The late Professor Winchell believed in a race of pre-Adamites, and many persons are committed to the theory of several centres of human origin. To those holding such views the question of Cain's marriage does not present particular difficulties. But those who hold to the theory that there was but one pair from whom all the family of mankind has sprung find difficulty in reconciling their theory with Biblical statements, and they are driven to acknowledging the necessity for marital relations between near kindred when the race was in its beginning--relations which would offend the best moral sentiment of to-day.

There is a curious passage in the Book of Genesis which tells of the marriage of the "sons of God" with the "daughters of men." Have we here the echo of that ancient tradition that once the gods and men intermarried and from the union the great heroes of the past were born? The close position of this statement concerning the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men" with the account of the great growth of evil in the world has led some to hold that these "daughters of men" were women from the unrighteous line of the murderous Cain, while the "sons of God" were men from the more upright family of Seth. Others, however, seeing also in close connection the statement that giants were on the earth in those days, find here a remnant of a very general tradition that from the gods had descended great heroes and giants who in past ages had fallen in love with daughters of human parentage. Since the Hebrews, however, were so strong in their monotheistic conceptions, this latter theory loses a great part of its force.

The state of society presented in the earliest Hebrew records indicates that the practice of polygamy was general. There are some who see indications among the Hebrew customs that there was a period, earlier than that of which any Hebrew records tell, in which polyandry and not polygamy was the fashion--when one woman had several husbands, rather than one husband several wives. The so-called Levirate marriage which was in vogue among the Hebrews is perhaps the strongest evidence that the customs of polyandry and mother-right were practised among them.

In common, then, with other peoples, the Hebrews practised polygamy; and while the influence of the best

thought and teaching was, except in the earlier, patriarchal period, distinctly against it, the practice was still customary even down to the Christian era. The law of Moses, while not forbidding plurality of wives, discouraged the custom, and especially forbade the king from "multiplying wives."

The earliest example of polygamy of which the Hebrew records speak is that involving one of the most unique and interesting families of this early twilight of human existence. One Lamech, a descendant of Cain, is said to have married two wives, who bore the rather musical names of Adah and Zillah. And here we are introduced into the presence of a most remarkable household. For not only is Lamech to be awarded the distinction of having made the earliest attempt at verse which the Hebrew tradition has recorded, but Adah and Zillah became the mothers of a most talented family; the former of Jabel, "the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle," and of Jubal, the inventor and patron saint of the harp and the pipe; while Zillah was the mother of Tubal-Cain, the first forger of implements of brass and iron. Lamech, the father, having doubtless received a sword from the forge of his son, used it in revenge upon an enemy, and gave utterance to the first recorded lines of poetry, which are possibly a fragment from what has been called *The Lay of the Sword*. It is a crude poem, dedicated by Lamech to his wives--for it was not uncommon among the early Semites to call the women to witness a hero's deeds of prowess:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,
Ye wives of Lamech, hearken to my speech,
For I have slain a man for wounding me,
Even a young man for bruising me.

If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
Truly Lamech, seventy and seven."

It is not to be wondered at that in the very midst of dry genealogical tables the writer of Genesis should have stopped for a moment to tell of this epoch-making household.

Whether the women of this unique family, Adah, Zillah, and her daughter Naamah, were equally gifted with the men of the household, we are not told; but surely there must have been some genius in those feminine members of the home, who were so closely connected with the beginnings, not only of the fine arts of poetry and music, but also of the industrial pursuits of cattle raising and of metal working.

The early Hebrews were nomads. At first glance it might appear that woman's part in such an order of society would be scant, and her life one of comparative inactivity. But this view would lead into error, for in the nomadic life, while the men were guarding their flocks from the depredations of hostile bands or from the ravages of wild beasts, the women were the home makers and the home keepers.

Mason, in his *Woman's Share in Primitive Culture*, commenting upon Herbert Spencer's division of the life history of civilization into the period of Militancy, and the later period of Industrialism, raises the question whether it may not after all be more in accord with the facts--at least in the early history of the race--to speak of a sex of militancy and a sex of industrialism. The Hebrew woman, from her place in the tent or seated about the tent door, not only tended the fire, but invented, developed, and carried on

many a handicraft into which not until later the men themselves entered.

For centuries the story of the lives of the patriarchs has thrilled and edified many a young heart, but what of the credit due to the *matriarchs*? What part do we find them playing in the early life of these Oriental peoples! The patriarch was not only father of his family or clan, but was their king and high priest. Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that the mother of the family was not an important factor in that early society, as the lives of many a Hebrew woman will easily demonstrate. The names of Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Huldah, and a host of others will readily occur to the mind of anyone at all familiar with the literature of the Old Testament.

A fair type of the life of the wife and partner of an ancient chief (*sheik*) of the higher order is found in that of Sarah, wife of the first and greatest Hebrew patriarch, "Abraham, the faithful." Living the life of nomad and shepherd, this pioneer of a new monotheism took his spouse away from the land of her fathers in the valley of Mesopotamia. Sarah's reverence for her husband became proverbial, and her conduct has been taken as the type of what was best in the domestic life of Israel--chaste behavior coupled with reverence. And Peter, known as the Apostle to the Hebrews, writing over two thousand years after the body of Sarah had been laid in its last home in the cave of Machpelah, gives a glimpse of the Hebrew conception of the ideal relation between husband and wife typified in Abraham and Sarah. While enjoining upon the women to whom he wrote the need of a "meek and quiet spirit," a spirit not discoverable

in jewels and elaborate apparel, but in what he terms "the hidden man of the heart," he said: "For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord; whose daughters ye are as long as ye do well." Thus did the virtues of Sarah impress themselves upon later generations. Sarah is not to be classed among the strong-minded women. Probably she was not virile in any true sense of the term, since in the traditions of her people she does not seem to have made for herself a place as leader that at all corresponds to the rank of her husband. He was to all Hebrews "Father Abraham," the first and foremost of his race; and no Jew could esteem his future life as giving promise of happiness unless his head might at length rest in Abraham's bosom. There is an ancient legend which says that Sarah, hearing of the plan of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the sacred spot of Moriah, died from the shock to her maternal heart. The father returned, bringing his only son alive with him, but Sarah had passed away. The narrative distinctly says that Abraham "*came* to mourn for Sarah and weep for her," as though the end had come during the absence of her husband. The Hebrew respect for women is illustrated in the costly burial accorded Sarah in a cave which was purchased from the sons of Heth--a place revered by the people of Israel for many centuries, because Sarah was buried there.

There is but one blot upon the life of this first mother of the Hebrews. Sarah was a faithful wife and devoted mother, but on at least one occasion she revealed a character

capable of hasty, jealous, and cruel conduct. It is the time for the weaning of her only son--an occasion of more than usual interest in a Hebrew home. The family feast is at its height; Sarah discovers that her handmaid, an Egyptian woman, Hagar, whom she herself had given to Abraham as wife, for thus we may call her, was jesting at her expense. Quickly and hotly she demands that the bondwoman and her son Ishmael be immediately driven from the home, to which request Abraham reluctantly yields. Like most other women, Sarah, though now aged, could brook no rival in her home, and her womanly instinct at once discerned that only a step thus sharp and decisive would prevent, in the circle of domestic life, endless friction, more bitter than the sufferings occasioned by her cruel action.

Hagar in the thirsty wilderness, laying her perishing child under a bit of shrubbery and then departing a little distance that her mother-eyes may not behold the end, has powerfully awakened the imagination of the artist, as, indeed, she touched the heart of the Almighty, as the record tells us. For although Hagar wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba, the region of "the seven wells," no water had she found--so far was she from the life-giving draught; and yet was she so near--for lo! her eyes now fell upon a well of water, from which she and the lad quenched their mortal thirst. Thus was preserved him who was to become the father of the Ishmaelites, a people whose hand was to be against every man, and every man's hand against them. The breach that day in the tent of Abraham, between his two wives, one bond and the other free, was to be deep and

abiding, as N. P. Willis, in describing Hagar's feelings in the wilderness, has written:

"May slighted woman turn
And, as a vine the oak hath shaken off,
Bend lightly to her leaning trust again?
O, no!"

And an apostle versed in rabbinic lore uses the story of Sarah as typical of the abiding difference between the principles of law and the precepts of grace.

Probably no feature in the social life of a people is of so universal an interest as its marriage customs, and there is no courtship, either ancient or modern, which has more enkindled the imagination and awakened the interest of men than that between Isaac and Rebekah. The English prayerbook, in its ceremony of marriage, has chosen Isaac and Rebekah as the ideal pair to whose fidelity the young couples of the later years are directed for inspiration and example. It is a truly picturesque and even romantic story, which never loses its charm; and Rebekah, whether at the well or in her household, will always present a unique picture of womanly grace and beauty.

This ancient wooing of Rebekah by Isaac, though it is by no means typical in all its details, contains many elements that mark Oriental weddings. The prominence of the parents in the negotiations is characteristic. It cannot be said, however, that the choice of either Isaac or Rebekah was constrained.

When Isaac and his parents have reached the conclusion to which Richter has given voice--"No man can live piously

or die righteously without a wife"--the faithful Eliezer is made to thrust his hand under the thigh of his master and swear that he will see that Isaac is wedded not to a daughter of the people around, but to a woman of his own kindred living in the regions of Aramea. This habit of marrying within one's own tribe became firmly fixed in Hebrew custom. The use of marriage presents, here so rich and costly, is almost as old as marriage itself; and how much Rebekah and Laban, her brother, were influenced by this manifestation of the riches of her wooer none can ever know. The part taken by Laban in this marital transaction is by no means unusual. Brothers in the East often played an important rôle on such occasions. When Shechem, the Hivite, wished to marry Dinah, daughter of Jacob, he consulted not only her father, but her brothers as well; and the brothers of the heroine of the *Song of Songs* are represented as saying: "What shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for?"

The courage of Rebekah in consenting to mount the camel of a stranger and go into a far country to be wed is noteworthy. With all the apparent grace and gentleness of Rebekah, here was a pluck most commendable. We may say with Dickens: "When a young lady is as mild as she is game and as game as she is mild, that's all I ask and more than I expect." But it turned out to be but one of the many cases, since the world began, of "love at first sight"; and affection strengthened with the years! The frequent and cynical remark that marriage is after all but a lottery will probably long survive. Isaac did not act upon the sentiment expressed in the remark of Francesco Sforza: "Should one

desire to take unto himself a wife, to buy a horse, or to invest in a melon, the wise man will recommend himself to Providence and draw his bonnet over his eyes." The daughters of Heth and of Canaan around him were not to his liking, and Providence seems greatly to have helped him in the emergency, for in the unseen Rebekah (whose very name means "to tie" or "to bind") Isaac found a lifelong blessing; and probably nothing could better disclose the wisdom of his matrimonial choice than the words of the Bible narrative, "and he loved her, and Isaac *was comforted* after his mother's death."

There is one blot upon Rebekah's record as a wife and mother, which, however, no less reveals a fault in Isaac's character as a father. It is a defect that was doubtless inherent in the ancient Oriental system itself. It was more usual than otherwise for mothers as well as for fathers to have *favorite* children. When both parents centred their affection upon the same child, usually a boy, it was ill for the rest; when mother and father were divided, it was ill for family felicity. Rebekah loved Jacob, the younger; Isaac loved Esau, the elder. And it is in this unfortunate distribution of parental affection that is to be found the beginning of a violent fratricidal feud, a long separation, as well as the causes which led to the bringing within the confines of Hebrew history two of the most important women of ancient Israel,--Leah and Rachel. Here again we find illustrated the fixed habit among the Hebrews to seek wives among their own people.

Among the Hebrews it was the custom that one who would acquire a wife must pay for her, either in money or in

service. Usually, the young girl's consent was not thought to be a necessary part of the matrimonial bargain, and a father delivered a daughter to the purchasing suitor, as he might a slave that he had sold to the highest bidder. The woman herself played but a secondary part. It is thus quite plain that in this early day, marriage did not depend upon a contract entered into between one man and one woman, but between two or more men. And yet, in ancient Israel, while daughters were sold for wives,--or, to put it less harshly, given away for a consideration,--there is no intimation that a wife was in any sense regarded as a slave; nor are there instances of a husband selling his wife for a consideration. Parents were usually the parties to matrimonial bargains. In the case of Jacob and Rachel, however, we do not find the parents making the match, for the parents of the pair are widely separated. Jacob falls in love with Rachel at his first sight of her, as she, at close of day, leads the flock of Laban, her father, to drink from the open well hard by the dwelling. Laban readily agrees to surrender his daughter to Jacob,--who doubtless had no purchase money to procure a wife,--if the young man will serve him for seven years. But at the close of the stipulated period, the wily Laban falls back upon an unwritten law among the people of the day, that the daughters must be taken in marriage in the order of their seniority. Thus Leah, the elder sister, is accorded to Jacob, and seven years' additional service is necessary for the possession of Rachel. Persistence wins, and Jacob is at length in possession of both Laban's daughters, but the victory was the beginning of a life of struggle. Some one has remarked: "The music at

a marriage always reminds me of the music of soldiers entering upon a battle;" it was so with Jacob. There must be a battle with Laban, the uncle and father-in-law, in which the daughters both take the part of the husband against their father, and agree to flee from that parent's house with the man to whom they had linked their destinies. There must be a battle with Esau, when mothers and little ones were to be exposed to great dangers and hardships; indeed, a long life of vicissitudes awaited the women whose lives were one with Jacob's, and contests between rival sons of rival mothers were to follow.

It has already been remarked that Sarah, wife of Abraham (whose name, Sarah, means "the princess"), occupies no such place in the imagination and tradition of the Hebrews as did Abraham, their *father*. It is around Leah and Rachel that the tribes of Israel group themselves, and the book of Ruth speaks of them as having built the house of Israel, and Leah and Rachel were the mothers of the twelve patriarchs for whom the tribes were subsequently named. Especially does Rachel occupy a high place, not only because she was Jacob's most favorite wife, but because of those personal qualities which more readily stirred the poetic and religious imagination of the people. The poet-prophet, Jeremiah, writing of the loss of life among the sons of Israel, because of the invasion and cruelty of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, represents the people's sadness at the terrible calamity as "Rachel weeping for her children because they are not"--an expression which may have been suggested by Rachel's early condition of childlessness, followed by the loss of both her sons, Joseph

and Benjamin, in the land of Egypt. The expression has borrowed new force, because it is quoted as again exemplified in "the slaughter of the innocents" by Herod the Great at the time of the birth of Jesus.

II

ISRAEL'S HEROIC AGE

[Table of Contents](#)

In the early history of the Hebrews, the people followed the free, roving life of the shepherd. In a climate where water supply was by no means sure, where a flowing stream which gave drink to the flocks to-day might be a rocky ravine to-morrow, families must needs have no certain abiding place. Woman the homekeeper must of course be affected by this Bedouin manner of life. Many daughters, like Rebekah and Rachel, were shepherdesses of their father's flocks of sheep and goats. When the Israelites went down into Egypt because the fertile valley of the Nile made famines less frequent than in the land of Canaan, they were somewhat ashamed, we are told, of the fact that they were shepherds, on account of Egyptian prejudices against that occupation, but in their native country they were proud of their occupation, and rather looked down upon merchantmen. The hated "Canaanite" became the synonym for "trafficker." It was the later exigencies of exile and dispersion that forced the Jews to buy and sell, and right well did they learn the lesson the world forced upon them.

But in the beginning it was not so. And hence we find Israel, even after the twelve patriarchs had settled in the plains of Goshen, their Egyptian home, keeping their flocks and developing their home life in their own way in the kingdom of the Pharaohs.

Among the many notable women of Israel's heroic age, Miriam must not be forgotten. The romantic story of the hiding of her infant brother, in the rushes of the Nile, when King Pharaoh would have destroyed every Hebrew boy, is a familiar chapter. The sisterly tenderness and devotion which stationed the girl of twelve years to watch what might happen to the infant brother, to fight away wild beasts, and at length to direct the living treasure to the bosom of its own mother, is one of the best examples in literature of womanly tact and sisterly devotion.

The daughter of Pharaoh, a child of the Nile, comes down to the sacred stream to wash her garments or bathe her body in the saving water, and quickly, indeed quite willingly, falls into the well-wrought plan of Jokabed, the mother of the child Moses, and Miriam, the sister--a counterplot to that of the princess's father, and so ancient history is written with new headlines.

It is Miriam who enjoys the distinction of being the first prophetess in Israel, as her brother Moses is the first who was called a prophet, and her brother Aaron the first high priest. The part she took in leading the intractable people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage into the land of the Canaanites, must have been considerable, though according to the record she was nearing the century mark before the journeying began. As a poetess and musician, also, Miriam

holds no mean place, for we are told that when her people had successfully crossed the arm of the sea, and Pharaoh's pursuing hosts had been cut off in the descending floods, Miriam organized the women into a chorus, and going before them with timbrel in her hand she led in voicing the refrain sent back in antiphonal strains to the song of the great camp, while her companions followed with timbrels and dances. This aged woman had music and patriotic fervor still present in her soul, as victory was assured to her people. The Hebrew song that grew out of this incident which is recorded in the Book of Exodus has been termed "Israel's Natal Hymn," a sort of poetic Declaration of Independence, and is far more majestic in its qualities than Moore's poem based upon the same event:

"Sound the loud timbrel; O'er Egypt's dark sea
Jehovah hath triumphed--His people are free."

By a singular confusion, the Koran identifies Miriam, sister of Moses, with Mary, the mother of Jesus. This may be partly due to the fact that the New Testament Scriptures as well as the Septuagint Greek translation of the Old spell both names alike, "Miriam."

But great women, like great men, sometimes make mistakes, and their blunders are often just at the point where they have achieved greatness. Miriam's distinction lay in her insight into the merits of her brother's mission and in her unselfish devotion to the cause to which he had been dedicated. Her greatest grief befell her by her unfortunate effort to break that very influence and to destroy his leadership, because she was displeased with a marriage he

had contracted. She was smitten with leprosy, but the esteem with which she was held may be discovered when we read that the whole camp grieved at her calamity and consequent isolation from the people, and "journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again."

Miriam, the first prophetess and one of the strongest women that Israel ever produced, died during the wilderness wandering, and was buried in the region west of the Jordan. For many generations her tomb was pointed out in the land of Moab. Jerome, the Christian father, tells us that he saw the reputed grave close to Petra in Arabia. But, like the place of the entombment of her more distinguished brother, "no man knoweth it unto this day."

Among no people has the national consciousness been more thoroughly developed or more deeply seated than among the Hebrews. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that among the women of Israel may be discovered the most ardent spirit of patriotism. Miriam's part in the founding of the Hebrew Commonwealth has already been noticed. When in the wanderings of the wilderness it became necessary to erect a temporary structure for the worship of Jehovah, the God of Israel, the women willingly tore their jewels from their ears, their ornaments from their arms and ankles, and devoted them to the rearing of the tabernacle. With their own fingers they spun in blue, purple, and scarlet, and wrought fine linen for the hangings and the service of their temple in the desert. In a theocracy, piety and patriotism were one. Not even the Spartan mother, who wished her son to return from the wars bringing his shield with him or being borne upon it, nor the women of

Carthage, who plucked out their hair for bowstrings, could surpass the women of Israel in their sacrifices for national independence and political glory. In the days of Octavia, the ministers of Rome levied a tax upon Roman matrons to carry on a foreign war, and demanded a sacrifice of their jewels; and the Roman women thronged the public places, appealing to the high and influential in their vigorous protest against this taxation, and thus saved their ornaments. But the women of Israel did not need to be urged to tear off their ornaments and devote them to the common welfare. It was a woman who received the first recognition for services rendered the victorious hosts of Joshua, after the first campaign against the Canaanites had been waged. This was Rahab, a woman of Jericho, who, though her past life had been far from exemplary, seemed to see in the approaching Israelites a people of destiny. She therefore hid the Hebrew spies who had come to inspect the land, and, letting them down over the walls of the city, saved their lives. Thus did Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, preserve her own life when Joshua entered the city a victor; and, being admitted among the people of Israel, she became the ancestress of their greatest king, David, and, through him, the ancestress of Christ.

During that era in Israel's life, when the people were no longer merely an aggregation of shepherd clans, but had not yet been moulded into a national existence by a strong feeling of unity or the recognition of a common need, woman's life was exceptionally severe in its hardships and dangers. The unorganized tribes, engaged in their agricultural and pastoral pursuits, with hostile clans about

them and hostile cities and strongholds as yet unsubdued, were subject to frequent incursions from bands of marauders and from armies of neighboring tribes, which would suddenly swoop down upon them like vultures on their prey. It was under such conditions as this that the women suffered untold indignities and misery. Kidnappers sold the women and children to slave traders of the coast, who carried them to Egyptian and Greek ports; so that even before the great dispersion of the children of Jacob which the kings of Assyria and of Babylonia brought about in the eighth and sixth centuries prior to the Christian era, the Hebrews were being scattered throughout the world.

It was in the period of transition and chaos which immediately followed the entrance of the people into the land of Palestine that Israel's most manlike woman appears as a veritable savior of her people. She is the second woman to whom the title of *prophetess* is accorded. The record reveals the fact that she was not only a woman strong in deeds of valor, but a leader in the religious life of Israel. The days were dark enough for the descendants of Abraham. For two decades now had Jabin, with his "nine hundred chariots of iron," struck with terror the ill-equipped, disorganized Hebrews. But there dwelt "under the palm tree" between Ramah and Bethel among the hills of Ephraim a woman who, by force of will and recognized wisdom, *judged* the people of Israel. "The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel." It is from the sanctuary of this woman's mind and heart that deliverance from the king of the Canaanites is to break forth. She is called Deborah,

i.e., "woman of torches," or "flames," either because she made wicks for the lamps of the sanctuary, or because of her fiery, ardent nature. Certainly there was warmth in her heart and fire in her love of her native land. She speedily sends for Barak, a chief man of Naphtali, and enjoins upon him to prepare an army of ten thousand men to meet Jabin's army, which is approaching under its captain Sisera, on the banks of the river Kishon. Barak hesitates, but at length answers: "If thou wilt go with me, I will go,"--so necessary did this strong, magnetic woman's presence seem for the enlistment of the people in the holy order of the enterprise. Deborah did not flinch in the presence of this challenge. The army is raised. The battle is joined, and Sisera's host is discomfited before Israel. The captain himself becomes a fugitive before the victors. But the end is not yet. Another woman appears upon the stage of this tragedy. The fleeing Sisera seeks shelter in the secret place of Jael's tent. Weary to exhaustion, the captain of the enemies of her people sinks down to sleep, the more profound because of the great draught of buttermilk or curds which Jael gave the thirsty man; and then with tent pin, a hammer, and an unquivering hand, Jael struck the sharp instrument through the sleeping man's temple and pinned him swooning to the dirt floor of her tent.

It was this bloody, but daring, deed which gave rise to one of the earliest of Israel's epic songs, the Song of Deborah. It is a remarkable poem, given in full in the Book of Judges. It sets forth praises to Jehovah for deliverance, and to Jael for the deadly stroke. A few lines from this epic, which many consider the earliest piece of Old Testament