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In The Temple

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Once there was a poor family—a man, his wife, and their little son—who walked about in the big Temple at Jerusalem. The son was such a pretty child! He had hair which fell in long, even curls, and eyes that shone like stars.

The son had not been in the Temple since he was big enough to comprehend what he saw; and now his parents showed him all its glories. There were long rows of pillars and gilded altars; there were holy men who sat and instructed their pupils; there was the high priest with his breastplate of precious stones. There were the curtains from Babylon, interwoven with gold roses; there were the great copper gates, which were so heavy that it was hard work for thirty men to swing them back and forth on their hinges.

But the little boy, who was only twelve years old, did not care very much about seeing all this. His mother told him that that which she showed him was the most marvelous in all the world. She told him that it would probably be a long time before he should see anything like it again. In the poor town of Nazareth, where they lived, there was nothing to be seen but gray streets.

Her exhortations did not help matters much. The little boy looked as though he would willingly have run away from the magnificent Temple, if instead he could have got out and played on the narrow street in Nazareth.

But it was singular that the more indifferent the boy appeared, the more pleased and happy were the parents. They nodded to each other over his head, and were thoroughly satisfied.

At last, the little one looked so tired and bored that the mother felt sorry for him. “Now we have walked too far with you,” said she. “Come, you shall rest a while.”

She sat down beside a pillar and told him to lie down on the ground and rest his head on her knee. He did so, and fell asleep instantly.

He had barely closed his eyes when the wife said to the husband: “I have never feared anything so much as the moment when he should come here to Jerusalem’s Temple. I believed that when he saw this house of God, he would wish to stay here forever.”

“I, too, have been afraid of this journey,” said the man. “At the time of his birth, many signs and wonders appeared which betokened that he would become a

great ruler. But what could royal honors bring him except worries and dangers? I have always said that it would be best, both for him and for us, if he never became anything but a carpenter in Nazareth."

"Since his fifth year," said the mother reflectively, "no miracles have happened around him. And he does not recall any of the wonders which occurred during his early childhood. Now he is exactly like a child among other children. God's will be done above all else! But I have almost begun to hope that our Lord in His mercy will choose another for the great destinies, and let me keep my son with me."

"For my part," said the man, "I am certain that if he learns nothing of the signs and wonders which occurred during his first years, then all will go well."

"I never speak with him about any of these marvels," said the wife. "But I fear all the while that, without my having aught to do with it, something will happen which will make him understand who he is. I feared most of all to bring him to this Temple."

"You may be glad that the danger is over now," said the man. "We shall soon have him back home in Nazareth."

"I have feared the wise men in the Temple," said the woman. "I have dreaded the soothsayers who sit here on their rugs. I believed that when he should come to their notice, they would stand up and bow before the child, and greet him as Judea's King. It is singular that they do not notice his beauty. Such a child has never before come under their eyes." She sat in silence a moment and regarded the child. "I can hardly understand it," said she. "I believed that when he should see these judges, who sit in the house of the Holy One and settle the people's disputes, and these teachers who talk with their pupils, and these priests who serve the Lord, he would wake up and say: 'It is here, among these judges, these teachers, these priests, that I am born to live.'"

"What happiness would there be for him to sit shut in between these pillar-aisles?" interposed the man. "It is better for him to roam on the hills and mountains round about Nazareth."

The mother sighed a little. "He is so happy at home with us!" said she. "How contented he seems when he can follow the shepherds on their lonely wanderings, or when he can go out in the fields and see the husbandmen labor. I can not believe that we are treating him wrongly, when we seek to keep him for ourselves."

"We only spare him the greatest suffering," said the man.

They continued talking together in this strain until the child awoke from his slumber.

“Well,” said the mother, “have you had a good rest? Stand up now, for it is drawing on toward evening, and we must return to the camp.”

They were in the most remote part of the building and so began the walk towards the entrance.

They had to go through an old arch which had been there ever since the time when the first Temple was erected on this spot; and near the arch, propped against a wall, stood an old copper trumpet, enormous in length and weight, almost like a pillar to raise to the mouth and play upon. It stood there dented and battered, full of dust and spiders’ webs, inside and outside, and covered with an almost invisible tracing of ancient letters. Probably a thousand years had gone by since any one had tried to coax a tone out of it.

But when the little boy saw the huge trumpet, he stopped—astonished! “What is that?” he asked.

“That is the great trumpet called the Voice of the Prince of this World,” replied the mother. “With this, Moses called together the Children of Israel, when they were scattered over the wilderness. Since his time no one has been able to coax a single tone from it. But he who can do this, shall gather all the peoples of earth under his dominion.”

She smiled at this, which she believed to be an old myth; but the little boy remained standing beside the big trumpet until she called him. This trumpet was the first thing he had seen in the Temple that he liked.

They had not gone far before they came to a big, wide Temple-court. Here, in the mountain-foundation itself, was a chasm, deep and wide—just as it had been from time immemorial. This chasm King Solomon had not wished to fill in when he built the Temple. No bridge had been laid over it; no inclosure had he built around the steep abyss. But instead, he had stretched across it a sword of steel, several feet long, sharpened, and with the blade up. And after ages and ages and many changes, the sword still lay across the chasm. Now it had almost rusted away. It was no longer securely fastened at the ends, but trembled and rocked as soon as any one walked with heavy steps in the Temple Court.

When the mother took the boy in a roundabout way past the chasm, he asked: “What bridge is this?”

“It was placed there by King Solomon,” answered the mother, “and we call it Paradise Bridge. If you can cross the chasm on this trembling bridge, whose surface is thinner than a sunbeam, then you can be sure of getting to Paradise.”

She smiled and moved away; but the boy stood still and looked at the narrow, trembling steel blade until she called him.

When he obeyed her, she sighed because she had not shown him these two remarkable things sooner, so that he might have had sufficient time to view them.

Now they walked on without being detained, till they came to the great entrance portico with its columns, five-deep. Here, in a corner, were two black marble pillars erected on the same foundation, and so close to each other that hardly a straw could be squeezed in between them. They were tall and majestic, with richly ornamented capitals around which ran a row of peculiarly formed beasts' heads. And there was not an inch on these beautiful pillars that did not bear marks and scratches. They were worn and damaged like nothing else in the Temple. Even the floor around them was worn smooth, and was somewhat hollowed out from the wear of many feet.



Once more the boy stopped his mother and asked: "What pillars are these?"

"They are pillars which our father Abraham brought with him to Palestine from far-away Chaldea, and which he called Righteousness' Gate. He who can squeeze between them is righteous before God and has never committed a sin."

The boy stood still and regarded these pillars with great, open eyes.

"You, surely, do not think of trying to squeeze yourself in between them?" laughed the mother. "You see how the floor around them is worn away by the many who have attempted to force their way through the narrow space; but, believe me, no one has succeeded. Make haste! I hear the clanging of the copper gates; the thirty Temple servants have put their shoulders to them."

But all night the little boy lay awake in the tent, and he saw before him nothing but Righteousness' Gate and Paradise Bridge and the Voice of the Prince of this World. Never before had he heard of such wonderful things, and he couldn't get them out of his head.

And on the morning of the next day it was the same thing: he couldn't think of anything else. That morning they were to leave for home. The parents had much to do before they took the tent down and loaded it upon a big camel, and before everything else was in order. They were not going to travel alone, but in company with many relatives and neighbors. And since there were so many, the packing naturally went on very slowly.

The little boy did not assist in the work, but in the midst of the hurry and

confusion he sat still and thought about the three wonderful things.

Suddenly he concluded that he would have time enough to go back to the Temple and take another look at them. There was still much to be packed away. He could probably manage to get back from the Temple before the departure.

He hastened away without telling any one where he was going to. He didn't think it was necessary. He would soon return, of course.

It wasn't long before he reached the Temple and entered the portico where the two pillars stood.

As soon as he saw them, his eyes danced with joy. He sat down on the floor beside them, and gazed up at them. As he thought that he who could squeeze between these two pillars was accounted righteous before God and had never committed sin, he fancied he had never seen anything so wonderful.

He thought how glorious it would be to be able to squeeze in between the two pillars, but they stood so close together that it was impossible even to try it. In this way, he sat motionless before the pillars for well-nigh an hour; but this he did not know. He thought he had looked at them only a few moments.

But it happened that, in the portico where the little boy sat, the judges of the high court were assembled to help folks settle their differences.

The whole portico was filled with people, who complained about boundary lines that had been moved, about sheep which had been carried away from the flocks and branded with false marks, about debtors who wouldn't pay.

Among them came a rich man dressed in a trailing purple robe, who brought before the court a poor widow who was supposed to owe him a few silver shekels. The poor widow cried and said that the rich man dealt unjustly with her; she had already paid her debt to him once, and now he tried to force her to pay it again, but this she could not afford to do; she was so poor that should the judges condemn her to pay, she must give her daughters to the rich man as slaves.

Then he who sat in the place of honor on the judges' bench, turned to the rich man and said: "Do you dare to swear on oath that this poor woman has not already paid you?"

Then the rich man answered: "Lord, I am a rich man. Would I take the trouble to demand my money from this poor widow, if I did not have the right to it? I swear to you that as certain as that no one shall ever walk through Righteousness' Gate does this woman owe me the sum which I demand."

When the judges heard this oath they believed him, and doomed the poor widow to leave him her daughters as slaves.

But the little boy sat close by and heard all this. He thought to himself: What a good thing it would be if some one could squeeze through Righteousness' Gate! That rich man certainly did not speak the truth. It is a great pity about the poor old woman, who will be compelled to send her daughters away to become slaves!

He jumped upon the platform where the two pillars towered into the heights, and looked through the crack.

"Ah, that it were not altogether impossible!" thought he.

He was deeply distressed because of the poor woman. Now he didn't think at all about the saying that he who could squeeze through Righteousness' Gate was holy, and without sin. He wanted to get through only for the sake of the poor woman.

He put his shoulder in the groove between the two pillars, as if to make a way.

That instant all the people who stood under the portico, looked over toward Righteousness' Gate. For it rumbled in the vaults, and it sang in the old pillars, and they glided apart—one to the right, and one to the left—and made a space wide enough for the boy's slender body to pass between them!

Then there arose the greatest wonder and excitement! At first no one knew what to say. The people stood and stared at the little boy who had worked so great a miracle.

The oldest among the judges was the first one who came to his senses. He called out that they should lay hold on the rich merchant, and bring him before the judgment seat. And he sentenced him to leave all his goods to the poor widow, because he had sworn falsely in God's Temple.

When this was settled, the judge asked after the boy who had passed through Righteousness' Gate; but when the people looked around for him, he had disappeared. For the very moment the pillars glided apart, he was awakened, as from a dream, and remembered the home-journey and his parents. "Now I must hasten away from here, so that my parents will not have to wait for me," thought he.

He knew not that he had sat a whole hour before Righteousness' Gate, but believed he had lingered there only a few minutes; therefore, he thought that he would even have time to take a look at Paradise Bridge before he left the Temple.

And he slipped through the throng of people and came to Paradise Bridge, which was situated in another part of the big temple.

But when he saw the sharp steel sword which was drawn across the chasm, he

thought how the person who could walk across that bridge was sure of reaching Paradise. He believed that this was the most marvelous thing he had ever beheld; and he seated himself on the edge of the chasm to look at the steel sword.

There he sat down and thought how delightful it would be to reach Paradise, and how much he would like to walk across the bridge; but at the same time he saw that it would be simply impossible even to attempt it.

Thus he sat and mused for two hours, but he did not know how the time had flown. He sat there and thought only of Paradise.

But it seems that in the court where the deep chasm was, a large altar had been erected, and all around it walked white-robed priests, who tended the altar fire and received sacrifices. In the court there were many with offerings, and a big crowd who only watched the service.

Then there came a poor old man who brought a lamb which was very small and thin, and which had been bitten by a dog and had a large wound.

The man went up to the priests with the lamb and begged that he might offer it, but they refused to accept it. They told him that such a miserable gift he could not offer to our Lord. The old man implored them to accept the lamb out of compassion, for his son lay at the point of death, and he possessed nothing else that he could offer to God for his restoration. “You must let me offer it,” said he, “else my prayers will not come before God’s face, and my son will die!”

“You must not believe but that I have the greatest sympathy with you,” said the priest, “but in the law it is forbidden to sacrifice a damaged animal. It is just as impossible to grant your prayers, as it is to cross Paradise Bridge.”

The little boy did not sit very far away, so he heard all this. Instantly he thought what a pity it was that no one could cross the bridge. Perhaps the poor man might keep his son if the lamb were sacrificed.

The old man left the Temple Court disconsolate, but the boy got up, walked over to the trembling bridge, and put his foot on it.

He didn’t think at all about wanting to cross it to be certain of Paradise. His thoughts were with the poor man, whom he desired to help.

But he drew back his foot, for he thought: “This is impossible. It is much too old and rusty, and would not hold even me!”

But once again his thoughts went out to the old man whose son lay at death’s door. Again he put his foot down upon the blade.

Then he noticed that it ceased to tremble, and that beneath his foot it felt broad

and secure.

And when he took the next step upon it, he felt that the air around him supported him, so that he could not fall. It bore him as though he were a bird, and had wings.

But from the suspended sword a sweet tone trembled when the boy walked upon it, and one of those who stood in the court turned around when he heard the tone. He gave a cry, and then the others turned and saw the little boy tripping across the sword.

There was great consternation among all who stood there. The first who came to their senses were the priests. They immediately sent a messenger after the poor man, and when he came back they said to him: “God has performed a miracle to show us that He will accept your offering. Give us your lamb and we will sacrifice it.”

When this was done they asked for the little boy who had walked across the chasm; but when they looked around for him they could not find him.

For just after the boy had crossed the chasm, he happened to think of the journey home, and of his parents. He did not know that the morning and the whole forenoon were gone, but thought: “I must make haste and get back, so that they will not have to wait. But first I want to run over and take a look at the Voice of the Prince of this World.”

And he stole away through the crowd and ran over to the damp pillar-aisle where the copper trumpet stood leaning against the wall.

When he saw it, and thought about the prediction that he who could coax a tone from it should one day gather all the peoples of earth under his dominion, he fancied that never had he seen anything so wonderful! and he sat down beside it and regarded it.

He thought how great it would be to win all the peoples of earth, and how much he wished that he could blow in the old trumpet. But he understood that it was impossible, so he didn’t even dare try.

He sat like this for several hours, but he did not know how the time passed. He thought only how marvelous it would be to gather all the peoples of earth under his dominion.

But it happened that in this cool passageway sat a holy man who instructed his pupils, that sat at his feet.

And now this holy man turned toward one of his pupils and told him that he was an impostor. He said the spirit had revealed to him that this youth was a stranger, and not an Israelite. And he demanded why he had sneaked in among

his pupils under a false name.

Then the strange youth rose and said that he had wandered through deserts and sailed over great seas that he might hear wisdom and the doctrine of the only true God expounded. “My soul was faint with longing,” he said to the holy man. “But I knew that you would not teach me if I did not say that I was an Israelite. Therefore, I lied to you, that my longing should be satisfied. And I pray that you will let me remain here with you.”

But the holy man stood up and raised his arms toward heaven. “It is just as impossible to let you remain here with me, as it is that some one shall arise and blow in the huge copper trumpet, which we call the Voice of the Prince of this World! You are not even permitted to enter this part of the Temple. Leave this place at once, or my pupils will throw themselves upon you and tear you in pieces, for your presence desecrates the Temple.”

But the youth stood still, and said: “I do not wish to go elsewhere, where my soul can find no nourishment. I would rather die here at your feet.”

Hardly was this said when the holy man’s pupils jumped to their feet, to drive him away, and when he made resistance, they threw him down and wished to kill him.

But the boy sat very near, so he heard and saw all this, and he thought: “This is a great injustice. Oh! if I could only blow in the big copper trumpet, he would be helped.”

He rose and laid his hand on the trumpet. At this moment he no longer wished that he could raise it to his lips because he who could do so should be a great ruler, but because he hoped that he might help one whose life was in danger.

And he grasped the copper trumpet with his tiny hands, to try and lift it.

Then he felt that the huge trumpet raised itself to his lips. And when he only breathed, a strong, resonant tone came forth from the trumpet, and reverberated all through the great Temple.

Then they all turned their eyes and saw that it was a little boy who stood with the trumpet to his lips and coaxed from it tones which made foundations and pillars tremble.

Instantly, all the hands which had been lifted to strike the strange youth fell, and the holy teacher said to him:

“Come and sit thee here at my feet, as thou didst sit before! God hath performed a miracle to show me that it is His wish that thou shouldst be consecrated to His service.”

As it drew on toward the close of day, a man and a woman came hurrying toward Jerusalem. They looked frightened and anxious, and called out to each and every one whom they met: “We have lost our son! We thought he had followed our relatives, but none of them have seen him. Has any one of you passed a child alone?”

Those who came from Jerusalem answered them: “Indeed, we have not seen your son, but in the Temple we saw a most beautiful child! He was like an angel from heaven, and he has passed through Righteousness’ Gate.”

They would gladly have related, very minutely, all about this, but the parents had no time to listen.

When they had walked on a little farther, they met other persons and questioned them.

But those who came from Jerusalem wished to talk only about a most beautiful child who looked as though he had come down from heaven, and who had crossed Paradise Bridge.

They would gladly have stopped and talked about this until late at night, but the man and woman had no time to listen to them, and hurried into the city.

They walked up one street and down another without finding the child. At last they reached the Temple. As they came up to it, the woman said: “Since we are here, let us go in and see what the child is like, which they say has come down from heaven!” They went in and asked where they should find the child.

“Go straight on to where the holy teachers sit with their students. There you will find the child. The old men have seated him in their midst. They question him and he questions them, and they are all amazed at him. But all the people stand below in the Temple court, to catch a glimpse of the one who has raised the Voice of the Prince of this World to his lips.”

The man and the woman made their way through the throng of people, and saw that the child who sat among the wise teachers was their son.

But as soon as the woman recognized the child she began to weep.

And the boy who sat among the wise men heard that some one wept, and he knew that it was his mother. Then he rose and came over to her, and the father and mother took him between them and went from the Temple with him.

But as the mother continued to weep, the child asked: “Why weepest thou? I came to thee as soon as I heard thy voice.”

“Should I not weep?” said the mother. “I believed that thou wert lost to me.”

They went out from the city and darkness came on, and all the while the mother wept.

“Why weepest thou?” asked the child. “I did not know that the day was spent. I thought it was still morning, and I came to thee as soon as I heard thy voice.”

“Should I not weep?” said the mother. “I have sought for thee all day long. I believed that thou wert lost to me.”

They walked the whole night, and the mother wept all the while.

When day began to dawn, the child said: “Why dost thou weep? I have not sought mine own glory, but God has let me perform miracles because He wanted to help the three poor creatures. As soon as I heard thy voice, I came to thee.”

“My son,” replied the mother. “I weep because thou art none the less lost to me. Thou wilt never more belong to me. Henceforth thy life ambition shall be righteousness; thy longing, Paradise; and thy love shall embrace all the poor human beings who people this earth.”

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