

W O M E N

OF THE

OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT:

A SERIES OF PORTRAITS.

With Characteristic Descriptions,

BY SEVERAL AMERICAN CLERGYMEN.

EDITED BY

WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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The Woman of Canaan.

THE CANAANITISH WOMAN.

BY REV. THOMAS SMYTH, D. D.

“THEN Jesus arose, and went thence, and departed into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon. And entered into an house, and would have no man know it: but he could not be hid. For behold a woman of Canaan, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and fell at his feet, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.”

“The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phœnician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But he answered and said unto her, Let the children first be filled, for it is not meet to take the children’s bread and cast it unto dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their master’s table; the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: and he said unto her, For this saying, be it unto

thee even as thou wilt; go thy way; the devil is gone out of thy daughter. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour. And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.”*

Behold her at his feet! with clasped hands
 And uprais'd eye: her parted lips are moved
 With words of earnest pleading; and her soul
 Is agonized with all a mother's woe.
 But he has turn'd away; nor word, nor look
 Of pity, or of comfort has vouchsafed.
 E'en his disciples, wondering, have join'd
 Their prayers with hers; and yet he is unmov'd,
 Nor merely silent. From his lips break forth
 Harsh and unlook'd-for words, "The children's bread
 Must not be given to dogs." Oh! who can tell
 The bitter grief in that poor suppliant's heart?
 She had come far to seek him, for she felt
 Her hope was all in him. No less a power
 Could wrest a child from the fell demon's rage;
 Yet once, with energy of deep despair,
 She humbly cries, "Truth, Lord: yet e'en the dogs
 The children's crumbs partake!"—Behold, the beam
 Of godlike pity glances from his eye!
 Her faith has conquer'd; and from out the gloom
 Of that dark night of woe, see dawn arise,
 The shining of the Sun of Righteousness,
 Rising for her with healing in his wings!

We have here a beautiful picture, embodying one of the most touching and picturesque scenes which "the romance of real life"

* Matt. xv. 21—29. Mark vii. 24—31.

could possibly supply. This picture is framed in a style of presentation inimitable for chaste and elegant simplicity, and the natural adornment of pure and unaffected emotion. And as we obtain a much more striking view of a fine picture by looking at its reflection, in a glass properly adjusted, we have such a glass provided in the case before us,—one by which the whole narrative, properly reflected, may impart its spirit of heavenly beauty to our own souls.

In this narrative, then, we “see as in a glass” “the shadow of good things to come.” The Saviour here teaches us by an example—a living parable,—so that the encouragement and instruction imparted, are equally applicable to all ages and to all persons. We have here, in short, a lively representation of the nature of salvation and the way in which it is to be attained. This woman was A STRANGER, driven by the winds of stormy adversity to seek shelter and deliverance in the fold of the good Shepherd. A type and emblem of this sinful and miserable world,—of the bitterness of sin, which like an evil spirit, vexes and destroys the souls of men,—and of the greatness and glory of that salvation which is revealed to us in the Gospel. When we remember, says Chrysostom, who she was, and what was her errand, we cannot but consider the efficacy of Christ’s coming and the power of his most glorious dispensation, which reached from one end of the world unto the other, embraced those who had not only forgotten God, but had also overthrown the laws of nature, and obscured that light which had been kindled in their hearts;—which called sinners, yea, even gross idolaters, to repentance;—and admitted even “dogs” to “participate in the children’s bread.”

Looking at the circumstances of the narrative we see in the event,—which was evidently foreseen and intended,—a pregnant illustration of that Providence which “directs our steps,” and “shapes our ends, rough hew them as we may.”

In consequence of the murder of John the Baptist by Herod, our Saviour had "departed by ship into a desert place apart." Being followed by the multitude, who now thronged upon him in vast numbers, he spent the day in healing and miraculously feeding them; and then dismissed both them and his disciples, and "went up into a mountain to pray." Being still, however, persecuted by the Scribes and Pharisees, our Saviour departed privately from the country of Gennesaret, and sought temporary seclusion in the borders of Tyre and Sidon. Here, though still in Judea, he was on the very confines of Phœnicia or the ancient Canaan, where he might hope to be perfectly retired. He entered therefore into an house, and would have no man know it. But as we are told that "the fame of him went throughout all Syria," he was soon discovered by the inhabitants—the remains of those ancient Canaanites whom God had commanded Joshua to extirpate on account of their aggravated wickedness. Tyre and Sidon had however remained unconquered, and had retained their idolatry till the time of Christ, when the superstition of the common people had become associated with an Epicurean atheism among the more enlightened and refined.

Such was the theatre on which was to be performed one of the most wonderful and instructive miracles of our Saviour. It was not long after his arrival before he was assailed with importunate demands upon that mercy which had never yet failed the petitioner, and from whose inexhaustible storehouse none had ever been sent empty away.

The suppliant who now cried unto our Saviour,—saying "Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David,"—was A WOMAN. A woman! and in that name how much is there of sacred, deep, and tender thought.

The very first

Of human life, must spring from woman's breast ;
 Our first small words are taught us from her lips ;
 Our first tears quenched by her, and our last sighs
 Full often breathed out in a woman's hearing,
 When men have shrunk from the ignoble care
 Of watching the last hour of wasting misery.

How much of the charm, the happiness, and the joys of life are
 given to it by woman, whose lot it is

To train the foliage o'er the snowy lawn ;
 To guide the pencil, turn the tuneful page ;
 To lend new flavor to the fruitful year,
 And heighten nature's dainties ; in their race
 To rear the graces into second life ;
 To give society its highest taste,
 Well ordered home, man's best delight to make,
 And by submissive wisdom, modest skill,
 With every gentle care eluding art
 To raise the virtues, animate the bliss,
 And sweeten all the toils of human life :
 This is the female dignity and praise.

How much, then, does woman need the elevating, the refining, and the equalizing influences of that "glorious Gospel" which teaches man—"who, while to man he is so oft unjust, is *always* so to woman,"—that in Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female ; and that while the two sexes are different in capacity and office, they are all one in nature, dignity, danger, and destiny. And how much, too, does the Gospel require and rejoice in the services with which woman

has ever repaid its countless benefits conferred on her. Last at the cross and first at the sepulchre; woman has always been found the first to acknowledge, the foremost to defend, the readiest to minister to, and the last to abandon or betray, Christ and his cause.

This suppliant was A WOMAN OF CANAAN; a Greek, as the Jews denominated all but themselves; a Syro-Phœnician, being by birth a Syrian. Her country, which was situated on the frontiers of the Holy Land, about three days' journey from Jerusalem, was entered by Canaan the grandson of Noah, in express contrariety to the allotment of God, when he "divided among the nations their inheritance," and when Palestine was reserved as "the Lord's portion." His eldest son gave his name Sidon to one of the chief cities of the country. In fulfilment of Noah's prophecy, therefore, the Canaanites had become "servants of servants to their brethren;" and having been extirpated or enslaved by his chosen people, under God's express command, their remaining posterity were always regarded by the Jews with feelings of peculiar aversion and contempt.

But in addition to this ignominious character of the suppliant, she was A HEATHEN—an idolater—and, as such, the object of divine malediction and national abhorrence to every Israelite, by whom all idolaters were regarded as unclean—as "dogs" and swine. This woman, therefore, was a Gentile,—a Greek,—one of the *goim* to whom the light and knowledge of revealed truth had never been imparted. These *goim* or Gentiles were, however, eventually to be made partakers of "the glorious Gospel of the blessed God." So prophets and "holy men of God, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," had long and often foretold. But the appointed time had not yet come when Christ was to become "a light to lighten the Gentiles," and thus "to perform the mercy promised unto the fathers." He was first to be "the glory of God's people Israel,"

and to make to them the offers of eternal life, before he “called a people who were not a people.” Our Saviour, therefore, that he might “fulfil all righteousness,” and do God’s will in all things, commanded his apostles to confine their ministrations during his life, and for a season afterwards, to Judea. For these reasons, therefore, he discouraged the application of this woman who had come from a heathen country, because she was *a dog*, and not yet admitted to the privileges of a child.

And such were we. Such was our original country, and our primitive ancestry — “far off,” — “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel,” — “without God and without hope in the world.” “But we are washed, we are sanctified,” we are adopted into the heavenly family, and made “fellow citizens of the saints,” “sons and daughters of the Lord,” and “joint heirs” to an inheritance divine.

This suppliant woman WAS IN DISTRESS. Calamity had driven her from her home and country, and had made the cities of Phœnicia and the coasts of Tyre and Sidon a desert to her troubled spirit. And thus it is that many a weary sinner is led to flee from the haunts of worldly gayety, frivolity and sin, by the winds of calamity and the floods of trouble.

For He who knew what human hearts would prove,
 How slow to learn the dictates of his love,
 That hard by nature and of stubborn will,
 A life of ease would make them harder still;
 In pity to the souls his grace designed
 To rescue from the ruins of mankind,
 Call'd for a cloud to darken all their years,
 And said—Go spend them in the vale of tears.

But our interest in this suppliant is increased by learning that she
WAS A MOTHER.

A mother! sweetest name on earth;
We lisp it on the knee,
And idolize its sacred worth
In manhood's infancy.

No earthly name can so sweetly soothe the breast or start the tear—
as mother. It brings with it the reverence, the sanctity and the love
of Heaven, and whatever is purest and most hallowed in the joys of
earth. To honor her while living,—to revere her memory when
dead,—to cheer her in despondency,—to succor her in adversity,—
and, when left alone, to be to her a home, a husband, and her all in
all of earthly good;—this is the willing tribute of every grateful
mind. And oh! when we recall the tender scenes of infancy,—call
back to sight a mother's bosom,—hear her lullaby,—survey her
toilsome, anxious cares,—and think upon that love which was happy
in our happiness, and miserable in our grief,—we feel that all the
recompense we can possibly make her is but as nothing.

A mother's love! the fadeless light
That glimmers o'er our early way,
A star amid the clouds of night,
An ever-burning, quenchless ray.

But in this suppliant behold not only a mother, but a mother
probably bereaved of her only earthly stay, and now afflicted in the
hopeless misery of that daughter who was perhaps her only child, and

who was now "grievously tormented by a devil." She was, therefore, the widowed mother of a demoniac daughter. The hour of Satan had then come, and "the powers of darkness" were then permitted to manifest their hellish rage, in order that their destruction might be the more illustriously displayed.

Poor Canaanitish mother !

Mark how she strays with folded arms,

And her head is bent in woe ;

She shuts her thoughts to joy or charms,

No tear attempts to flow.

All hope has fled. Vain pity heeds her not. Earth affords no refuge. The heavens gather only the blackness of darkness. Whither, ah ! whither can she flee ? There was but one refuge which could supply a covert from the storm, and but one physician who could apply a balm to her wounded spirit. Blessed be God ! she has found that refuge and secured access to that good Physician. When she fled from that desolate home, and escaped from the unnatural fury of that demoniac daughter, an invisible hand directed her steps, and led her to him who was able to save even in this uttermost extremity. Despair not then, oh thou widowed and worse than childless mother ! But pour out all thy soul before his throne in prayer.

Before his throne, who never yet did frown

One humble suppliant from his mercy-seat ;

Who, if with guilt thy soul is bowed down,

In the right path will lead thine erring feet ;

He who refused not Mary's mournful plea,

Will shed bright rays of joy and set thy spirit free.

Mystery and miracle of grace! She — the wanderer, the Canaanite, the idolater, the outcast, homeless, friendless mother — believes. See her as she presses eagerly towards the sacred person of the Saviour. Behold her as she now forces her way to his presence, and falling down worships him, saying, “O Lord, thou Son of David, have mercy upon me, for my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.” How short, how simple, but oh! how unutterably earnest and importunate that prayer! She had heard of the promised Redeemer, who should “bruise Satan under his feet; destroy the works of the devil, and unloosing their fetters, bid his captives go free.” Amid her desolate voyage over life’s stormy sea, this hope of deliverance had been as an anchor to her soul. God had shined upon her to give her the light of the knowledge of his mercy as it is exhibited in the face of Jesus Christ. To him, therefore, she comes. She goes neither to the physicians nor to the magians of Phœnicia, but casts herself with all her cares upon him who is able to save both soul and body.

Oh that every weary heart, to whom God has sent the attracting and convincing influences of his Spirit, would “work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, seeing that it is God who worketh in them both to will and to do.”

If there’s a prayer, like spring’s first flower,
 More sweet than all the rest,
 ’Tis offered in that hallowed hour
 When first the heart’s impressed.
 The angels listen to that prayer,
 Then bear it up to heaven;
 And who can tell the joy that’s there,
 When such a one’s forgiven?

What means this woman had enjoyed of coming to the knowledge

of Christ as Lord and yet man, as the promised Redeemer, and as one mighty to save, we are left to conjecture. They must have been at best very limited and partial. Unlike to us who live in the sunshine of religious privileges, she must have groped her way out of darkness into the marvellous light of the Gospel. "O woman, great is thy faith!"—which, springing from a grain of mustard seed cast into a dry and barren soil, became a tree of such gigantic growth and vigor. "O Lord, increase our faith," and let not this heathen rise up in the judgment and condemn us. To her there was no personal promise, and no assurance of personal acceptance. But believing that if Christ willed he could grant her request, she threw herself upon him,—when repulsed, returned again,—and thus wrestling against apparent severity and rejection, her language, like one of old was, "I will not let thee go until thou bless me." Oh for such faith as hers!—such faith as cleansed the leper,—healed the lame,—unsealed the deaf,—unchained the palsied tongue,—illumined the blind,—cheered the sorrowful,—imparted peace, meekness, charity, and love,—and raised even the dead to life. Could we enjoy such faith—and why should we not?—looking to God's exceeding great and precious promises, and to them alone, we might smile upon impossibilities, and say "it shall be done."

She does not doubting ask, can this be so?

The Lord has said it, and she needs no more.

Mark the natural and becoming modesty of this woman's faith. She stood at a respectful distance. There was no vociferation, no loud and bitter lamentations, no murmuring complaints. Having uttered her requests, she awaits in silence the hoped for answer. Oh! how prevalent is such a gentle and assured disposition with him in whose

sight a meek and quiet spirit is of great price! While, therefore, Christ answered not a word to her prayer, he “made answer to her silence, and he who regarded not her noise, made a reply to her reverence and adoration.”

Her might is gentleness—she winneth way
By a soft word, and by a softer look.

Mark the patience of this woman's faith. As the evening star brightens while the darkness envelopes the earth, so did her faith seem fairest and most illustrious amid increasing and apparently insurmountable difficulties. She seems to say, “though he slay all my hopes, yet will I trust in him.” She lay therefore at his feet in prostrate penitence and tears, and “worshipping him, said, Lord, help me.”

Blessed, yet sinful one, and broken-hearted!
The crowd are pointing at the thing forlorn,
 In wondering and in scorn!
Thou weepest days of happiness departed;
Thou weepest, and thy tears have power to move
 The Lord to pity and love.

What humility, what ingenuity, and what perseverance does the faith of this suppliant exhibit! A woman, a mother, a widow, afflicted in an only child, and yet no sympathy in Jesus, not even a reply; and when he did speak, a repulse, a denial, and opprobrious recrimination! And can she endure all this? Was ever faith like hers? No. Never was there such faith even in Israel; and if Abraham is “the father,” she may be styled the mother “of the faithful.” She faints not. She despairs not. She is dumb and opens not her

mouth. Every accusation she ratifies. Every charge of unworthiness she aggravates as true in all its force. When a stone is given her instead of bread, and she is made a dog rather than a child, she thankfully receives even this admission, and supplicates divine compassion upon herself as chief of sinners and not worthy to be called a child. While admitting, therefore, that she was unworthy of the children's meat, she asks to be permitted to eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table. Thus like Manasses and David, did she acknowledge her vileness, saying, "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done evil in thy sight, that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest and clear when thou judgest." She admits the truth in all its self-condemnation, and "is not able so much as to lift up her eyes to heaven, but smites upon her breast." She draws encouragement from seeming repulse, and says, "For thine own mercies' sake, pardon mine iniquities, for they are great." She prizes the least communication of mercy as a priceless blessing, and reposes her hope upon the affluence and all-sufficiency of the Saviour's love. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

So it was with this poor suppliant. In her Christ has given an illustrious example of faith, of patience, of humility, of modesty, of prudence, and of perseverance; which shall be mentioned to her praise, and to the encouragement of all who shall hereafter come unto the Saviour, wherever in all the world this Gospel of the grace of God shall be preached. She had been tried so as by fire, that like gold she might be seven times purified. Christ, for a small moment, had forsaken her as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and in a little wrath had hid his face from her for a moment. But with greater mercies did he gather her, and with "everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." The darkness therefore passed away. The star of hope arose upon her darkened breast.

She "heard the voice of joy and gladness, that the bones God had broken might rejoice." She who had victoriously endured the trial, and had clung to the anchor of Christ's word amid every discouragement, now saw his countenance lifted upon her in peace, and heard those blessed words, "O woman, great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

Joy, joy to the mother! her Saviour hath spoken,
 The word hath been uttered in accents divine,
 Arise, lo! the power of the tempter is broken,
 And, disconsolate mother, thy daughter is thine.
 Thus, Lord, when distressed, we poor sinners resemble
 In hopeless dejection this object of love,
 Give peace to those hearts that as anxiously tremble;
 Oh! revive their lost souls by thy word from above.

"And her daughter was made whole from that very hour,"—whole, we would believe, spiritually as well as physically. And is it not delightful to hope that this redeemed captive, having been led by her mother to the knowledge of the Saviour, was able, like many a child of maternal faith and prayer, with devout thankfulness to say:—

And if I e'er in heaven appear—
 A mother's holy prayer,
 A mother's hand, and gentle tear
 That pointed to the Saviour dear,
 Have led the wanderer there.