

The Marvellous Harp.

Translated from the Hebrew of Moses Simon.

By SAUL KLEIMAN.

"When the Temple was destroyed," grandfather commenced in a low tone, "the Holy Land made desolate, and our ancestors were exiled, every captive took along something from the Holy Land for a remembrance. Some took twigs from the cedars of the Forest of Lebanon, others picked some lilies of the Valley of Sharon, and still others selected, for their token, olives from the Mount of Olives. The token of the Levites, however, consisted, not of things from the Forest of Lebanon or the Mount of Olives, but of instruments which they played in the Temple at the Divine Services, and which escaped destruction.

"Among the exiled there was an old Levite, a member of the choir of the Temple. His instrument was an ancient Harp which, because of its wonderful power, had been preserved in a particular chamber in the Holy of Holies. The same Harp very long ago hung above King David's bed, and miraculously played by itself very midnight when the north-wind touched its strings.

"It was this remarkable instrument that the oldest of the Levites took with him as a keep-sake of the Holy Land when he was led into exile. It was so endeared to the old man, that he put it in a golden case and hugged it all the way. When evening approached and the captives sat down to rest from the exhausting journey, the old Levite would take out the wonderful Harp and play it. And as soon as the melody was heard in the silence of the night, a solemn inspiration would seize the unfortunate group of wanderers. It seemed to them that they were sitting, on their own soil, in the Temple.

"But only for a short time did they enjoy this marvellous instrument. When they arrived at the rivers of Babylonia, and the Levites were asked by their captors to play of the songs of Zion, the old Levite approached the willows of the banks, kissed his Harp for the last time, and, exclaiming in tears, 'How can we sing the song of the Lord on the soil of strangers,' hung it upon one of the willows forever.

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"Many years and ages have gone by," grandfather continued after a few minutes' pause, "and the wonderful Harp is still hanging there on the willow. No wind, storm or cyclone is able to move it from there.

"Every night, when the pious Jews rise for the Midnight-Service bewailing the loss of their Holy Land which was put waste, and that the people were exiled and scattered to all the extremities of the earth, a sorrowful murmur is heard from among the willows of the rivers of Babylonia. This comes from a fresh breeze which is whispering to the trees about the Land of Israel, its serene

skies and pure air. Then the skies disclose a small opening through which a black-winged angel descends soaring towards the Babylonian river; the moon withdraws, concealing itself behind the dense clouds; the stars extinguish one after the other; heavy clouds cover the whole expanse; and the black-winged angel, reaching the willow upon which the Harp was hanging, takes the instrument and commences playing.

"And how sad and pleasant would his melody be! It expressed so much yearning, so much longing for life of infinite freedom, for bright skies and an immaculate sun!

"The angel eulogises the *past* of our people, the time when we lived on our own soil, which now is in the hands of strangers. And crystal, pure tears rolled from the angel's eyes and moistens the strings of the Harp. His lamentations blend with those of the observers of the Midnight-Service, and are transformed into a tremendous mournful sound, which continuously increases, until finally he ascends high into the atmosphere, even into heaven."

"A voice is heard above,

"So sad, so pitiful!

"It is the voice of her—

"Of Zion the beautiful!"

"When the black-winged angel ceases his woeful melody, he hangs the tear-moistened Harp upon the willow, and soars into heaven.

"After this, another is disclosed in the skies, and another angel with white wings descends and soars in the atmosphere. The clouds disperse, skies clear up, and the beautiful, round-faced moon, surrounded by Sapphire-like sparkling stars, majestically reappears upon the circle of the expanse.

"The white-winged angel approaches the willow and takes the Harp. Immediately, joyous melodies of consolation are heard pealing in the air of the whole plain. This angel's melodies are concerning the *future* of our people, about its rehabilitation of the Holy Land. His remarkable music is the prelude of the songs which our people will sing in the future among the mountains of their country.

"And his melodies rise and echo the prayer:—

"Thou wilt have mercy upon Zion;

"For it is time to favour her;

"For the appointed time is coming!"

"And as the Aurora rises upon the edge of the sky, and blue strips of light appear on the horizon, the white-winged angel ceases playing his sweet music, and, hanging the Harp on the willow, soars up again into heaven!"

Book Review.

"Fire of Youth," by Margaret Pedler; Hodder & Stoughton, London; 5s. 6d.

Margaret Pedler has given us a love story which might well have been written in the remote days before the war—so naive is its theme, so simple its characters. It brings back memories of the once familiar but now almost completely vanished "Be good, sweet maid," and "Lived happily ever after" novels of the days of our youth. To those who enjoy stories of this type it will afford a couple of hours' pleasant reading.

L.B.B.

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