

The early life of Jephthah, the father of our first heroine Adah, was not happy. Because he was an illegitimate son of Gilead, he was thrust out of his home by his brothers so that he would have no share in their inheritance. Although he was a man of courage and valor he fled to Tob to escape from the wrath of his brothers. Jephthah must have had a certain amount of popularity for the Scriptures tell us that many went out of the land of Gilead with him.

In the process of time the children of Ammon made war against Israel. The leaders of the house of Gilead, lacking a leader and recognizing the courage of Jephthah then came to him and urged him to return and be their captain. But Jephthah was not too easily persuaded. He reminded them of their former unkindness to him and refused to return unless he would be made their captain and head. This the leaders solemnly promised and the covenant between them was made at Mizpah.

Jephthah then returned to Gilead and immediately sent a message to the children of Ammon asking for an explanation of their unfriendly acts. When it was found that the children of Ammon would not listen to reason nor to Jephthah's messages, he organized and equipped his army.

Then the Bible says, "Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord and said: 'If thou wilt deliver the children of Ammon unto mine hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.'"

The Scripture continues, "So Jephthah passed over unto the Children of Ammon to fight against them; the Lord delivered them into his hands."

Jephthah's reputation as a great leader was fully upheld in the conflict. There was a great slaughter and twenty cities held by the Ammonites were conquered. Little did Jephthah realize what a fearful price he would be called upon to pay for this victory.

On his return journey he was met on all sides with flowers, music and great acclaim. There was unheard of rejoicing throughout the land.

At Mizpah, where he lived vast preparations were being made to receive him as a hero and conqueror. A rapturous welcome awaited him. As he neared his own home behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; beside he had neither son nor daughter. And there fell on Jephthah a blow more cruel and fearful than he had ever received in his life before, for he recalled his vow, "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace shall surely be the Lord's."

When he saw her, Jephthah in his anguish, rent his clothes and cried out, "Alas, my daughter thou hast brought me very low, for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord and I cannot go back." As Jephthah with deep suffering related the story of his vow, Adah was struck with horror at her unhappy fate; but the courage born in her triumphed over fears and she made this reply, "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth."

Where can we find greater courage? This young girl resorted to no quibbling, no thought of subterfuge or permissible redemption. "Forasmuch as the vow was made unto the Lord" it must be without question in her mind fulfilled; and she would not have been Jephthah's daughter if she dissuaded him to let the thought of her life and happiness deter him from keeping his vow.

Only she asked, "Let this thing be done for me, let me alone two months, that I may go up and down the mountains and bewail my virginity. And her father said, "go".

She returned at the end of two months to her father who did to her according to the vow which he had vowed. There has been much conflicting opinion as to whether Jephthah literally did according to his vow, probably brought about by the revulsion of feeling at the thought of such a sacrifice, and also because such a sacrifice was not in conformity with the Jewish law. But the conclusion of the narrative in Judges leaves us little room for doubt as it states "it was a custom of Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days each year".

In the present/day Jephthah's vow seems entirely unjustifiable. In the first place he had no business to make the vow, and secondly he had no right to fulfil it after it was made. Henry Ward Beecher says: No man has a right to break a pledge which he unwittingly made in respect to things that are moral and are in the rightful control of his will but no man has a right to make a promise or vow that is immoral. When he makes a blind covenant, he has no right to keep it when it involves others in cruelty or injustices.

But that is not the phase of the story which interests us most. We see Adah, faithful to her duties, no matter how overwhelmingly difficult they are. We see her brave and courageous in the face of death itself. We see her forgetting self to save her father's honor. No sacrifice which she is called upon to make is too great.

Might not all these virtues of a courageous life be a beautiful lesson to us? We are not called upon to make as great a sacrifice as Adah, but each day we are called upon to show our colors. Will these colors be the blue of fidelity? Will we have the courage of our convictions and be as dauntless and serene as Adah? Let each one of us take the lesson taught by her life to heart and walk in the paths of truth and right.

"For sweet Adah weep not; let the word be:
"Joy to the captive, freed from earthly dust;
Joy for one witness more to woman's trust;
And lasting honor, Mizpah, be the strain
To her who died in light without a stain."

She will not veil her pure and loving eyes,
As fearing death-for hers is death sublime,
Lo, with determined heart and eyes she stands,
Her face upturned toward celestial lands.

R. Morris.

The story of Jephthah's daughter has other lessons for us also. Jephthah made a rash vow, one that he surely would not have made if he had pondered upon it. Whom should he expect to be the first to come out of his house if not his daughter? We all have much in common with Jephthah

Lord, if I had the choice to don one virtue as a cloak of gold,
It would be the cloak of courage I would wear.
Courage to speak when speech can help;
The strength to leave unsaid the words
That passing anger tempts the lips to speak;
Courage to fight when only death can be the end,
And fight so well that men shall see in death but victory.
Courage to lift my thoughts above the mundane cares that
 strangle life;
Courage to bring none harm; courage to dream,
So when the end comes, I may pass
Into the vale that lies beyond,
And wear this cloak of Courage as I go.