



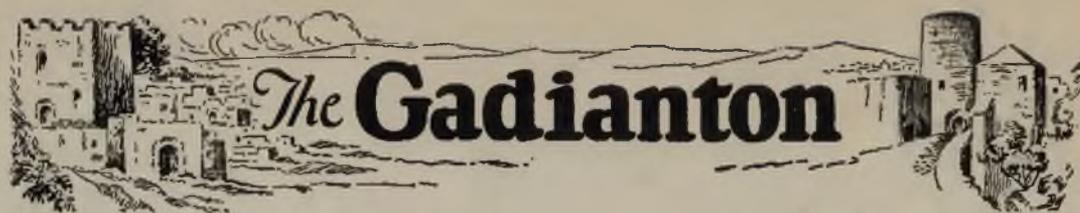
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The Gadianton: A Story of Zarahemla, Chapter VII

Author(s): E. Heloise Merkley

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The Gadianton

A STORY OF ZARAHEMLA

By E. Heloise Merkle

VII

"Where are the servants? Why is there no light nor fire?" Jarom demanded as he laid the moaning form of his mother upon the luxurious couch.

"The servants fled when they took me away," was the reply," and when Zemnah told me you had returned and brought me back just a little while ago, I could not make a fire or get a light." She shivered and moaned again weakly.

Jarom covered her gently with what was at hand and then left her while he went to procure fire and light the torches. He met one of their former servants on the street and sent him to gather up the rest and bring them back, assuring him that he need have no fear, since Giddianhi had conferred upon him the title of "The Gadianton" and there was no suspicion as to his loyalty to the band. Then he returned and soon the servants joined him in his efforts to make his mother comfortable.

But it was very little they could do. Gadianton tortures seldom left their victims long to suffer, and his mother was not strong before. Weakened by two days without food, the joints of her body twisted until some of them would not return to place, and beaten cruelly, she was beyond much help. Her spine had been so injured that her poor twisted legs were paralyzed, and so mercifully relieved from consciousness of pain. But the rest of her body tormented her without respite during the few days that she lived.

Before the servants, and whenever there was any possibility that they might hear, she and Jarom refrained from murmuring a single word of complaint against the unwarranted

cruelty of those who had treated her thus. They knew too well the possibilities of worse if they dared complain. But Jarom's heart was very bitter, not only because of this outrage, but because of the ugly system that lay behind it, because according to the secret laws of the order he had no redress, because he knew that this was only an incident in the dark history of the secret order.

In the silent hours of the night, when everybody else slumbered, as he sat by his mother's side, watching the frail thread of her life weaken and weaken, she would whisper to him thoughts of revenge. At first, he scarcely dared confess even to her, that he had turned traitor to the Gadiantons and agreed to help their enemies, before ever he found her thus. So strong had been her loyalty to the band that he hardly dared believe she could have turned entirely against it even now.

"But mother," he said, one night when she had been talking thus, "this is only the common thing. We are not the first who have suffered because of unwarranted suspicion. The Gadianton band was founded by a murderer to protect a murder, and murder and bloodshed and cruelty have been its motto ever since. Why should we, being one of such a cruel band, complain if the cruelty accidentally makes us suffer?"

The torrent of bitterness with which she answered him made him fearful that someone might hear, and he went to the door to see if anyone were near. They were quite alone.

"All that you say is quite true," he replied when she finished for lack of strength to say more, "but you have al-

ways known it, and still you have taught me that only among the Gadiantons is there safety. Would you then have me leave them and go to join the Nephites? You have always taught me, you know, to hate the Nephites."

"Oh, Jarom, I was blind! I didn't know because I wouldn't see, until they showed me. But my son, my son, can you endure to see me suffer thus and not curse those who have caused it?"

"If there is no God, as the Gadiantons teach, why should I curse them?"

"Oh, but there is a God! And He revenges the weak upon those who make them suffer. I tell you I know now there is a God. And this suffering is a punishment to me for having denied and scorned Him and His laws. But Jarom, my son, remember what Orpah taught us while she was here, and turn to that God and seek justice upon those who have done this thing to me."

"Orpah talked of a God who loved us, not one who dealt out vengeance."

"Oh, but she talked of a God of justice, too. Worship Him, my son! Call upon Him for justice! Seek strength from Him to make Giddianhi and Zemnarihah suffer as I suffer now."

Then, haltingly, and still in fear lest he be overheard, Jarom told her of the change that had been wrought in his attitude toward life, of how he had made friends with Gidgiddoni, of the counsel he had given, and of its results.

"You see, mother," he explained in conclusion, "I did not do this for personal vengeance but because it seemed to me that the crimes of the Gadianton band were so enormous, its principles rooted so deeply in the blackest injustice and so inevitably productive of such things as this, that it was the entire system I wished to fight. I have dedicated myself to the accomplishment of this with the help of the Nephites and the God they worship. And so you may rest assured that with the blessing of God upon my efforts, they, with all

the rest, shall suffer for their crimes. And since they have done this thing to you, I shall, if ever I am in battle against them, or find opportunity, make it a special point to see that they are punished. But for now I must still seem to be 'Jarom the Gadianton' as they named me tonight. I do not believe that I have been righteous enough to claim special vengeance from God. But I believe that the crimes of the Gadiantons are enormous enough so that for the sake of all they have caused to suffer, and who were better than I, God will use me as one weak instrument to annihilate them. It is not so much the individual He avenges, I am sure, as it is the evil he wipes out."

"You are right, my son. I see it now. We are not worthy to claim God's vengeance for us alone. But for all the children of Lehi, He will do it. I was narrow, Jarom. You had a broader view than mine. And you will succeed. And so, after all, I shall be avenged—gloriously avenged."

That night his mother died, and Jarom undertook the difficult task of dissembling his bitterness and seeming reconciled to those who had done the cruel thing.

He was not much surprised that Giddianhi should call personally upon him, when the word went forth that she was dead, and that he should say regretfully, "It was a mistake, Jarom. But I hope you understand the rules of our order sufficiently to see that it could scarcely be avoided and that circumstances rather than persons were to blame."

"It seems hard," Jarom replied, carefully choosing his words, "but I realize that my remaining away so long was the cause of it. Nor can I blame myself entirely. It is only a result of the system we live under. And however bitter my personal grief may be, I should find it hard to choose any person to accuse of a wrong to me."

"Spoken wisely, O Gadianton, and like the man your father's son should

be," Giddianhi exclaimed, and then, without more words, exchanged with Jarom the secret sign of the brotherhood of Gadianton.

As his Chief turned to go, Jarom breathed a sigh of relief. He was sure now that he had won the full confidence of Giddianhi.

Scarcely an hour later Zemnahiah approached the house of Jarom, and sought to learn the young man's attitude in almost the same way Giddianhi had done. He, too, was reassured at Jarom's response, and departed after exchanging the secret sign with him.

And so, alone, and doubly lonely, Jarom remained among the Gadiantons and played the part he had assigned himself. The house, haunted as it was by memories of Orpah and his mother, the only two persons he had ever truly loved, seemed more dismal than a tomb to him, and his dislike to remain in it doubled his activity as a spy. He was almost constantly on the road between Giddianhi and the land of Zarahemla.

Never did his interest in the activities of the Nephites lag. He could scarcely believe his eyes as he watched the rapidity with which they assembled in the two lands specified for their gathering, the smoothness with which Gidgiddoni and Lachoneus organized and controlled them, or the speed with which the fortifications were renewed where they had been and extended where they had never before stood. And the thing that amazed him most was the fact that when they were all gathered together, their lands left desolate, confusion and strife did not arise among them.

The vast lands of Zarahemla and Bountiful had become as one enormous teeming city, yet its thousands and thousands of people seemed constantly busy, constantly peaceful. So great was the unifying influence of a common danger, and a common faith, that they dwelt in equality and brotherhood as one vast, loving family.

As the fortifications were completed,

it became impossible for any other Gadianton to gain access to the interior. Jarom alone, protected by the magic words, "I bear a message to Gidgiddoni," found it possible to make his way inside the walls and then to get out again.

He was always careful, however, to give a truthful account, lest some other might some day be able to make his way inside and learn whether he spoke truly or not. And he usually managed, too, by seeming to exaggerate the resources of the Nephites, to make the Gadiantons believe they were far less than they actually were.

On one of his excursions within the walls, he found Gidgiddoni just inside, inspecting the work of his soldiers, now completed. He greeted Jarom as a friend and bade him come with him.

Mounted upon swift horses they started along the top of the fortifying wall, within the palisade erected according to the plans of the great Moroni, and rode rapidly as though they would make the entire circuit of the country. And as they rode, Gidgiddoni called Jarom's attention to the strength and security about them. At each point where a company of soldiers was stationed, he stopped to receive a report of the number of men and arms under its captain. And each report he read to Jarom as they rode toward the next camp. All day they rode, and the next day and the next. It seemed to Jarom that they never would reach the other end of the wall nor cease adding reports of resources to the pile already acquired. And when at last they reached the southern extremity of the land Zarahemla and started upon the other half of the circle back to where they had started, he grew dizzy trying to compute how many thousands of swords and shields and breast plates and spears and bows and arrows the Nephites would have if they continued to produce as many for the next seven years as they had done in the last half year.

At last they reached again their starting point and Gidgiddoni turned smilingly to Jarom and said, "Well, my Gadianton spy, have you enjoyed our little pleasure ride?"

"I have enjoyed it extremely," Jarom replied, "but going in a circle thus seems to have made me dizzy. I wish I might go back and see if I could forget the sums we have heard on the way."

"Your wish is granted," Gidgiddoni laughed, "for now I must examine the storehouses of food, and since it made you dizzy to go toward the right hand, we will this time go the other way, and so perhaps overcome your dizziness."

The next morning, mounted again, they retraced the great irregular circuit. This time, however, they did not ride upon the walls, but followed the smooth paved road. And it seemed to Jarom that there was no end to the amount of food stored in the great storehouses which had been built. Another marvel, he saw, too, which he had not before noticed. In every courtyard, in every corner not occupied, and upon every housetop, the richest and most fertile of soil was being made to produce more of such foods as could be raised upon a small scale and those that would not keep when stored. Not an inch of ground was wasted. Not a person was idle. Not an animal but was sleek and well fed. And not one that was superfluous. The best farmers taught those who knew little about it, how to raise the most from the ground. The most experienced raisers of cattle had charge of keeping the great herds in perfect condition. Everywhere was industry and prosperity.

When again they had returned to their starting place, Gidgiddoni once more smilingly inquired, "And has the dizziness departed, O Gadianton?"

Jarom did not reply directly, but answered instead, "Are you sure we are not doing the Nephites an injury by

planning the destruction of the Gadiantons?"

"What do you mean?" Gidgiddoni queried.

"Why only this. Never have I beheld the Nephites so prosperous and happy. And it is all because the Gadiantons have threatened them with loss of liberty and worse. Then, when the Gadiantons are exterminated, and with the Lamanites united with them, will they not go back to the old ways and become unhappy and disunited once more?"

"Perhaps they will not remain as they are now," Gidgiddoni replied, "that would be impossible even with the Gadiantons not exterminated, because this is an artificial life and in a generation the country would be overcrowded, the food would be gone, and they must scatter to till the soil more extensively. No, Jarom, the Gadiantons must go. Their crimes have condemned them. But tell me, my son, what are their resources as compared with ours?"

"Their resources cannot be measured as can yours," Jarom replied, "because they are already beginning to dwindle to the wild beasts that may be hunted in mountain and forest. Some supplies of food we have, indeed, but not a drop in the ocean as compared with yours. Our numbers of fighting men are less than yours, but I believe they are as well armed, or will be by the time Giddianhi tires of waiting for you to starve. And we have not so many women and children as you, even according to the number of our men. But if you can keep these eager soldiers of yours patient until Giddianhi brings his armies down, and if you make no attempt to seek us in the fastnesses of the mountains that we know so well, you cannot lose the contest. But it will be a contest against time, and he who loses patience will lose more."

(To be continued)

God provides food for all the birds, but He does not drop it in the nest.