



Type: Magazine Article

The Bible as Recreational Reading

Author(s): Adah Roberts Naylor

Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 38, No. 12 (December 1935)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 742–743, 745

Abstract: This article discusses the pathos and drama of the Bible.

By
**ADAH
ROBERTS
NAYLOR**

THE BIBLE AS RECREATIONAL READING

"For like a child, sent with a fluttering light,
To feel his way across a gusty night
Man walks the world. Again and yet again
The lamp shall be, by fits of passion slain.
But shall not he, who sent him from the door
Relight the lamp, once more and yet once more?"

ALL mortals bring into the world with them a spark of divine light. For the few it burns steadily; holding it high they light their way, and stand as the great moral leaders of the world. But for the many it burns with a "fluttering flame" that comes and goes, and is "by fits of passion slain," so if the many are to make their journey across the world, their light must be from time to time rekindled by God. One of the ways in which God renews the light is by His Word, which is to be found in that collection of books known to us as the Holy Bible.

To the present generation the Bible is known mostly as a reference book, a source of texts for sermons. They feel that to read the Bible is to be old-fashioned and sanctimonious, and so they have not learned that it has more good reading, and more interesting reading in it, than any other book in the world. If we treat it as merely a book among books it is still the most thrilling one ever written. It is a living thing—a powerful dramatic story of a vital, passionate people—a desert people who lived on the burning sand under a blazing sun—a people who thought in pictures and visualized their emotions. It is a story filled with faith and hope, with friendship and treachery, with loving and sinning, with fierce battle and death. And yet running through it is always the clear thought that right is right, and wrong is wrong; we see evil destroy itself and right expand and sanctify all that it touches. In this day of moral confusion, when modern literature leaves one with a

FROM her great and understanding sire, President Brigham H. Roberts, Mrs. Naylor acquired the seeing eye and the understanding heart. In this brief bit of poetic prose she reveals many of the beauties which are to be found in the book of books—the Bible.

Mrs. Naylor now resides in California, but her heart is with her people and her father's people.

feeling that vice is not so bad any more, and virtue not so very good, we need to grow old-fashioned and get back to the straight-forward thinking that is to be found in the Bible. Written by a multitude of men, over a period of many centuries, and being the history of not a few people, but of a race, it necessarily contains all types of literature—poetry, allegory, history, folk-lore, law, ballads, and drama—and so it is that no matter what particular line of reading you may prefer you will find it in your Bible.

IF you are interested in grandeur of thought, and would be lifted up by the wings of imagination, read in the first chapter of Genesis that sublime hymn of creation—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." In order to get the full force and beauty of it, you must recognize it as a poem written in six stanzas, each stanza ending with the refrain, "And the evening and the morning were the—day!" Unfortunately the men who gave us our version of the English Bible did not understand the Hebrew structure of poetry—a structure that depends upon the recurrence of thought rather than recurrence of sound for rhythm, and so it is that we lose much of this great poem if we read it as if it were written in straight prose.

If you prefer the simple lyric form of poetry, read in the Songs of Solomon that lovely Spring Song.

"My beloved spake, and said unto me:
Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away,
For lo, the Winter is past,
The rain is over and gone;
The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing of birds has come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land."

If you are looking for drama, read Job. Carlyle says, "I call the Book of Job, apart from all theories about it, one of the grandest things ever written with a pen."

Most critics will tell you that the Book of Ruth is the most beautifully told story in all literature, "the daintiest of love idyls," says Goethe. It has an unusual theme, the love of a girl for her mother-in-law, her devotion, her fine sense of duty, and her reward. No more beautiful pen picture has ever been made than the one of Ruth gleaning with the other maidens in the fields, where, by her industry and gracious ways, she attracts the attention of Boaz, the rich land owner.

How delicately the author tells us of Ruth's visit to him in the evening after he has eaten and rested! How keen is Naomi's understanding of human nature and how wise her counsel! And so Ruth and Boaz are married, and I like to think that they lived happily ever after—for unto Ruth was born a son whom she named Obed, and unto Obed was born Jesse, and unto Jesse, David, the great king of Israel. And through the line of David came Mary, the mother of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

TIMES and customs change, but the desires of the human heart, the elemental emotions of love and hate, joy and sorrow, know no change—it is as Goethe says, "Mankind is always advancing, but man is always the same." And so it is that in the fascinating story of the beautiful Rebekah of Nahor recorded in Genesis, we see the same impulses and desires actu-

ating this maid as stir in the hearts of the maidens today. Note the joy with which she receives the gifts of jewelry brought by the servant of Abraham to Nahor where he has come in search of a wife for the beloved son, Isaac; her willingness to leave home and loved ones and go into a strange land to find a mate, then the sweet thought of her mother who would hold her for a few days longer. But Rebekah does not tarry; she goes straightway with the servant back to the home of Abraham. And Isaac—it must have been spring time when a young man's fancy turns to thoughts of love, for we find him walking in the fields at eventide, evidently watching for the servant's return, for, "he lifted up his eyes and saw, and, behold

the great men of all time—a man beloved by God—David, the great king of Israel. There is no richer romance than this story of a shepherd boy who became king: fair to look upon, strong in body, a musician and a poet, a warrior and a ruler, a great lover, and sad to say, a great sinner; he passed through most of the experiences that come to mortal man.

While I live I shall always remember the thrill that came to me as a child, when my father, prefacing and explaining would read the account of David's encounter with Goliath. There were King Saul and the men of Israel arrayed in battle against the Philistines. And there was Jesse the Bethlehemite whose three sons were encamped with the Army of Israel,

a man that we may fight together." There was the fear of Saul and his men, and David's "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the Living God? I will go forth and fight this giant." And then the human touch, the envy and jealousy that were kindled in the eldest brother's heart. There was the audience with the king and the humorous incident of Saul trying to fit his huge armor on the daring youth, and David's splendid determination to trust in God and go as he was, smooth stones in bag and sling in hand. Then came the great moment, Goliath of Gath drew near, and out stepped the young shepherd boy, so straight of limb, so strong of arm, so stout of heart, and upon hearing the curses



the camels were coming." Rebekah when she saw him "lighted off the camel" and stood before him shy and lovely, and he took her into the tent of his mother, Sarah. And she became his wife and he loved her dearly. Beautifully and simply it is told and all quite as stirring as it must have been when it was first recounted some four thousand years ago.

IF your taste runs to biography turn to the Book of Samuel and read there the life story of three men, one of whom ranks among

"WHEN LOVE REIGNS," BY NATHAN STRUTT
Photo by C. C. Pierce.

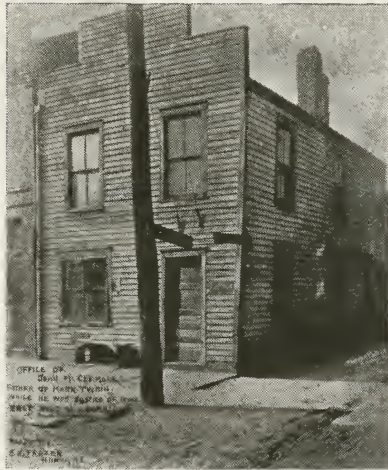
and who, anxious for news from the front, called his youngest son David from where he was feeding the sheep in the hills about Bethlehem, and sent him with corn and bread to visit his brethren. And there was David arriving at the camp just as the armies were going forth to "fight and shout for battle." There was the giant Goliath coming out of the camp of the Philistines saying, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me

of the astonished, armored champion he spoke to him in words spirited enough to stun any man.

"Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite, and take thy head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that

(Continued on page 745)

By
GEORGE F. PAUL



LAW OFFICE OF JOHN M. CLEMENS, FATHER OF MARK TWAIN, HANNIBAL, MISSOURI

HANNIBAL was proud of its location, of the lordly bluffs that rose in a great sweep that carried them high up above the river. To the north was Holliday's Hill, to the south was Lovers' Leap. To the east lay the great river, bearing onward to the Gulf. Rafts floated lazily by. Steamboats woke the echoes with their powerful whistles and spoke of a world of romance that was waiting on down the river. Only a hundred miles to the south lay the city of St. Louis, whose waterfront was crowded with panting steamboats.

The hills and woods around Hannibal where the young Mark Twain roamed with his playmates were most alluring. There was Bear Creek where he learned the mysteries of the paddle stroke and soon thrashed around in the water like a stern wheeler. There was the cave with all its allurements—black, silent, spooky, mysterious—just the place to snuggle down near the entrance and talk in whispers of what might be lurking even at that very moment back in the black shadows. What a spot for adventure with a flaring torch to guide the way!

And then there was the river—that golden pathway to his older dreams. It lured him with its majesty and power. There was a sense of strength about the powerful current that swept along the marvelous steamboats into the haze of a fairyland off to the south that



IN MARK TWAIN'S OWN COUNTRY A STATUE TO TOM SAWYER AND HUCKLEBERRY FINN

kept calling, calling to the youth.

Little wonder that the tousle-headed boy would sit for hours gazing wistfully, longingly at every craft that dotted the river's broad expanse. Maybe he was dreaming of the days that were to come when he would be wearing a uniform in the pilot house and swinging the big boat round at a jolly clip to make a landing. Golden days and golden dreams for the man who was to make ten million boys firm and fast friends of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn!

The Bible as Recreational Reading

(Continued from page 743)

all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel."

Then flinging a stone, he struck the giant between the eyes, and he fell upon his face to the earth. No more thrilling adventure has ever been told.

David's whole life was filled with adventure; there were thrilling days when as Captain of an outlaw band he lived in the wilderness, evading Saul who sought to kill him. And there were the days as king when he led the army of Israel to victory. He was the king of the sword and the king of song—he ruled well and "lifted up his people." But with wealth and power came the terrible sin; his punishment was great, but never did he harden his heart or turn from God. The last days were sorrowful ones: there was disruption and intrigue in his family, and pestilence upon the land—"And now David was old and stricken with years, and they covered him with clothes, but he got no heat."

I always weep when I read these lines and wish that he might have died at the height of his power; but "Our times are in His hands" sings Ben Ezra. God, the potter, binds our clay fast to the whirling wheel of life, until we are finally shaped into a perfect vessel fit to do service in His kingdom. These are a few of the many stories to be found in the Bible—perfect in diction and beautifully told. And through them all is heard the voice of God, directing, rebuking, and loving his children.

When Will This Day Come?

(See picture, page 743)

THEN the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
And the cow and the bear shall feed;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox;
And the nursing child shall play on the hole of the asp,
And the weaned child shall put his hand on the viper's nest.
They shall not hurt or destroy.
In all my holy mountain;
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea."