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Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter VI

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Abstract: This series is a novel based on the fictional character Mulek, an inhabitant of the city of Zarahemla during the war between Amalickiah and Moroni. The sixth part consists of chapter VI.



MULEK of Zarahemla

By J. N. WASHBURN

SYNOPSIS

MULEK loved Zarahemla, the city of his forefathers, where two factions were striving for power, one ruled by Amalickiah, a man of tremendous powers and winning manners, who had caused a rupture in the country, and the other by Moroni, young chief captain of the armies of the Nephites who went everywhere, encouraging, instructing, pleading with the people to unite in the country's defense. Accustomed to receiving the adulation of the people, Mulek was consumed with jealousy at his fall from favor. In order to call attention to himself he had mocked the priests of the church and allied himself with Amalickiah. Then to win their adulation he decided to support Moroni's projects. Mulek was eager to win the favor of the girl, Zorah, niece of Amram, a boatmaker. He devised ways of meeting her, but Zorah was too intent on the political unrest to be interested in him, and was lavish in her praise of Moroni, which added to Mulek's envy. Was he never to be free of this sense of his inferiority? But he determined in some way to win Zorah's approval. While in this mood he was approached by Pachus with the subtle suggestion that he, Mulek, should be made king.

CHAPTER VI

IT is not difficult to follow, imperceptible though the changes were, the progress of the course by which Mulek permitted himself to be convinced that he was destined to restore the kingship to the Nephites, to bring again, and for good, law and order to a people fretting under incompetent government. The process was long, and the reasoning subtle, but the end was certain.

From the easy-going, contented youth he had been, he was transformed into a forceful, driving man. Throughout it all he did not once notice that nobody but Pachus ever spoke of his becoming the king. Others talked of a decision as to the form of government to be preferred, discussing the matter freely and openly.

One day, after much time spent in conferences and study, a group of influential citizens sent a delegation to Pahoran with a memorandum. Governor Pahoran received the group ceremoniously, if stiffly, for he was worried, knowing full well the reason for the visit.

"What is it that you would have at my hands?" he inquired. "Is it something pertaining to the welfare of the nation?"

"Most noble Pahoran," the spokesman said, "we represent a large body of citizens who have prepared a schedule which we respectfully submit for your consideration. We urge, most learned judge, that you give it your immediate attention."

Pahoran took the scroll and gave his promise that the petition would receive his earnest and prompt consideration.

No sooner had his visitors gone than Pahoran put aside all other matters that he might devote himself to the perusal of the weighty

document. He was a young man to be confronted with so formidable a business. He had a regular, intellectual face, a brow of depth and flexibility, a chin that signified to any discerning person that he would not be easily imposed upon. He was an honest man, and godly, having no desires but for the welfare of his country.

He opened the record he had received and read it with a sinking heart. Here was a matter that might easily lead to serious trouble for his cherished country. It set forth with reserve yet with perfect clarity and seemingly unerring logic the facts which Pachus had rehearsed to Mulek, and a great deal more to the same purpose. One point in particular was driven home convincingly.

"We direct your notice to this fact: namely, that most of the political troubles of this nation have arisen from discontent over the government of the judges. While the kings yet directed our affairs, there was little difficulty in national management. That which one generation, for conditions peculiar to it, may deem expedient, the next may not approve, once affairs have resumed their normal posture.

"It would seem to be fundamental to any system of good government that it be responsive to the will of the people." The petition urged that the chief executive voluntarily retire from office in order that another might be chosen to direct the nation's affairs. It was, all in all, a blunt, fair, and challenging proposal.

After he had studied it, the governor shut himself in and gave his thoughts to study and devotion. There was none to whom he could turn but God. He had no human counselors at hand. Moroni and Helaman were busy with national affairs. Alma and his own father Nephihah had gone the way of all the earth. Was ever a man in sorer straits?

All that day, and most of the night, in the kindly atmosphere of his home, he grappled with his worry. For a short time in the early morning he slept. Next day he returned to his public office a calm man. It did not take long for him to word the message he sent to the embassy.

"Were I to consult my own desires in this thing which you have asked of me, I should gladly step aside, for I have found that he who stands out from the people stands alone, save God be with him. His time is not his own; his dearest motives are questioned; his life is public property.

"But in this matter I have no choice. I did not appoint myself to this thankless task. If it is your pleasure that I resign in order that another, of himself, or at the behest of a small group, assume my duties, to this I cannot accede.

"I am here by mandate of the people, whose will is sovereign, and only they can justly request my removal. The people are supreme in a government such as ours, as you yourselves have so pertinently observed. I humbly submit my case to them and suggest that you do likewise.

"Pahoran, Governor and Judge."

THERE was some gloom in the gathering to which this letter was brought and read. The members broke out into confused wrangling. Some had confidently expected that Pahoran would leave of his own free will and that they could easily put another into his place without too much public fuss. A few maintained that the governor was absolutely sound in his statement of the case. Others began at once to clamor for a decision by the vote of the people in compliance with Pahoran's expressed demand. A handful became abusive.

The blow to Mulek's hopes and pride was almost a mortal one. He had built the structure of his dreams, not on the secure foundation of reason and probability, but upon the sands of desire, shifting sands at that. By degrees he had come to look upon himself as practically enthroned, so insidious had been the lessons that were hammered into his eager ears.

Zorah had returned to Zarahemla, and he had seen her frequently. Each time her reserve had seemed to lose something of its earlier strength. Each time she appeared new and different even while she remained eternally and unchangeably feminine. To Mulek she was womanhood personified. He came almost to worship her and grew thoughtful toward all women.

Zorah was tolerant, at times even friendly toward him. Never had he known such exquisite torture of happiness. He dared not go too often to her home, and he could hardly stay away.

One thing more than all else had occupied his thoughts, and to that all other thoughts were related. If he could receive the appointment to which he was entitled, the office of king, he would ask Zorah to be his wife, his queen. Then let Moroni look to his honors! Day and night he was obsessed with this dream. He would tell Zorah of his plans as soon as it became practicable. Meanwhile he burned up his energies in impatience. To have this bright prospect shattered was almost more than he was able to endure.

IF the matter of the change in the government had been discussed freely before, it was now broadcast throughout the country, and such a commotion as it stirred up had seldom been known. It was discussed eagerly, gaily, soberly, despairingly, flippantly, according to the tempers of those who talked, but it was discussed.

Little time was needed to convince everyone that there was but
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one way out of the difficulty—to have a general election. The officials promptly set about appointing a day for the balloting. Meetings were held everywhere; the whole land was in a perfect tempest of excitement.

On the last night before the election, a great public meeting was held in the park in Zarahemla. Men were assigned to present final arguments for both sides in the controversy.

An exponent of the democratic principle spoke long and powerfully on the virtues of the existing organization. He seemingly settled the matter when he read from the history the words of that Mosiah who had brought about the change in the form of government.

"Now I say unto you, that because all men are not just, it is not expedient that ye should have a king or kings to rule over you.

"For behold, how much iniquity doth one wicked king cause to be committed, yea, and what great destruction!"

There was shouting and mumbling, cheering and grumbling at the close of the forthright argument. There were smiles on many faces and dark frowns on others.

Then the defender of the kings rose to speak. He too gave a forceful address, and he too closed by reading from Mosiah, from the same proclamation, indeed.

"Therefore, if it were possible that you could have just men to be your kings, who would establish the laws of God, and judge this people accordingly to his commandments, yea, if ye could have men for your kings who would do even as my father Benjamin did for this people—I say unto you, if this could always be the case it would be expedient that ye should always have kings to rule over you."

Were there not righteous men among the Nephites? The speaker grew passionate. Did not the Nephites still have good men who could rule in righteousness? Were all the honorable and wise men dead and in their graves? Were the sons worse than their fathers? Had there ever been a wicked king in the history of Zarahemla? On this note the discussion ended.

Again there were cheers and long

faces, but now those frowned who before had smiled, and they complained who had previously exulted. And it went from one end of the land to the other throughout the night.

THAT evening Mulek walked home with Zorah. Mulek was again confident enough to have his blood racing. His very nearness to the girl seemed to set him on fire.

"But could we make such a change without war?" she asked.

"Was there war when the kings were done away with?" He was eager to get her views on the subject of the kingship, to sound her out regarding the magnificent project in his mind, but he did not know how to go about it.

They walked slowly and quietly homeward. The freighted words each might have spoken would not rise to utterance. The only messages were spoken by the stars, the trees, the wind, and the darkness, and these both understood.

He bade her good night at her door and turned away, his steps borne as on wings.

The commotion and excitement that came the next day were unparalleled. People flocked to the voting places. Strong, sober, industrious people they were in the main, mindful of their obligations to themselves and posterity. Whatever the outcome, it would be a triumph for peaceful processes.

All that day the balloting rooms were thronged, and at night a nation returned to its homes, subdued and content. When the votes were counted, it was found that the free-men were in the majority. The king-men were beaten, and Pahoran remained governor and chief judge.

To most of the people, naturally, the victory of the free-men at the balloting was welcome. They rejoiced that the government was still solid, the system still sound. They returned to the business of defending the country and supposed things to have resumed their accustomed state. This, however, was far from the case, though not many knew it. The king-men, in extreme bitterness, began to meet secretly and to plan a course of their own, a course that was wholly selfish and treasonable.

THE blow to Mulek's pride and hopes—the loss of the election—was devastating. At first he was stunned and unbelieving, pale and inarticulate, like a numb body. Only by degrees did feeling and complete comprehension come back to him, first the realization of emptiness in his heart, then the full awareness of his new position with regard to Zorah. That was the point at which he was most grievously affected. After a brief period of inaction and dullness he passed into a mood in which he was as he had never been before, hot with a fierce anger, an unreasoning upheaval of spirit.

His people had rejected him!

Pachus, for purposes of his own, piled fuel on the fires of his wrath until the one time idler became obsessed. His people had rejected him! He would make them pay if he could. At that very hour the Lamanites, with Amalickiah at their head, swarmed into the land! They came in such numbers that they could not be estimated, much less counted. They spread over the country like a spring flood from the high mountains. Nothing could stand against them, neither city, army, nor fortification.

Whether the king-men had foreknowledge of this dire invasion no one knew, but if they did not, it came at a most opportune time for them, a most unfortunate time for the people of the Nephites.

The government called upon all eligible fighters to respond immediately for the defense of the fatherland. The king-men refused to heed the call. This was almost a mortal blow to the nation. To a man, thousands strong, they stubbornly, even gloatingly, maintained their unwillingness to help their country.

Pahoran was beside himself. He sent at once a message to Moroni, telling him of the new and unprecedented threat to the country. Moroni, preparing his defenses in Bountiful, was incredulous.

He wrote to the governor asking for permission to march his army into the capital to bring the rebels to time. Pahoran replied at once, feverish with anxiety for the welfare of his people, bidding the captain rush.

(To be continued)