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Mulek of Zarahemla, Chapter VIII

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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 eighth part consists of chapter VIII.

MULEK *of* Zarahemla

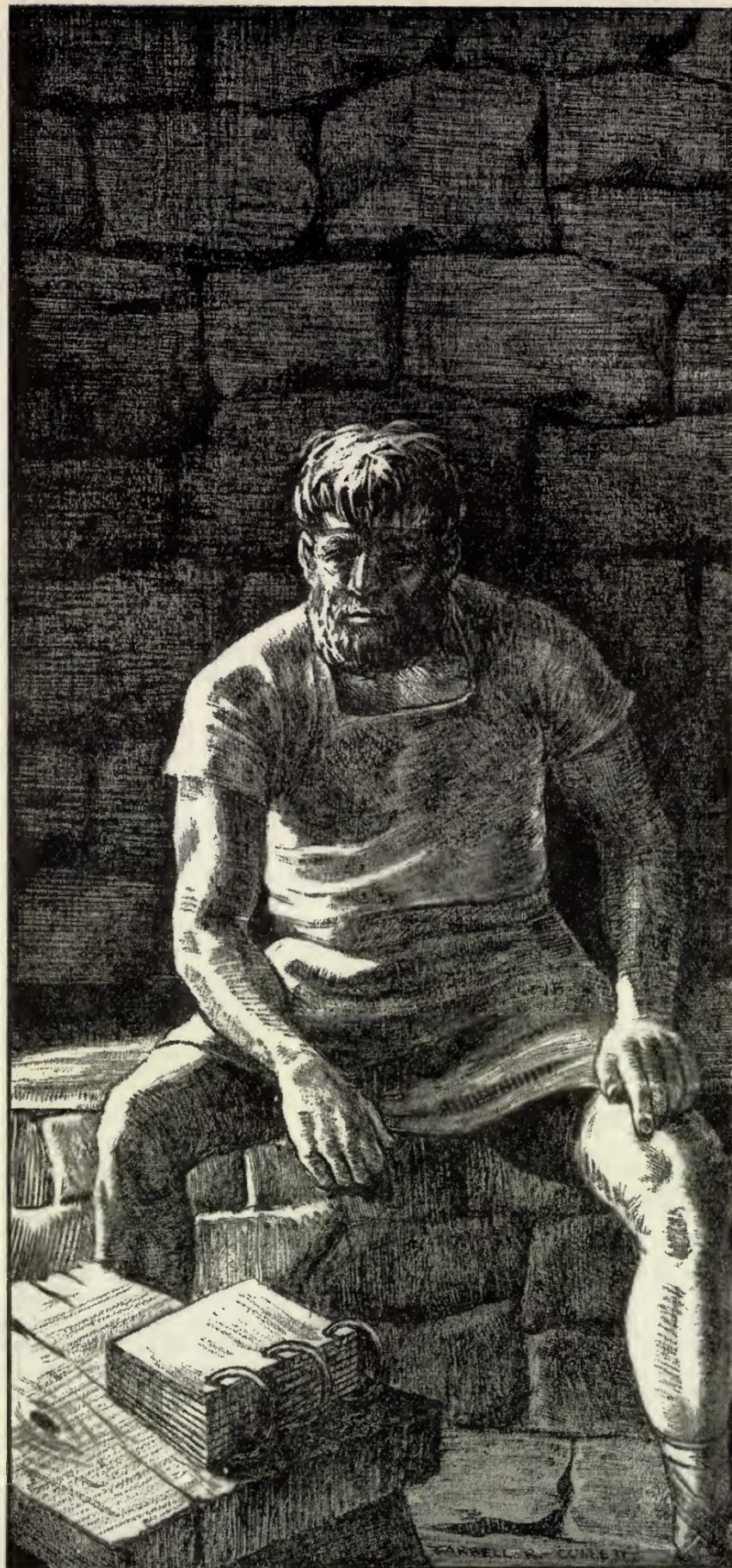
By J. N. WASHBURN

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 one 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 praise 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. He determined in some way to win Zorah's approval. When, therefore, one of his friends approached him with the idea that he become king—even as his forefathers had been kings—he entertained the thought. A general election was called for and granted by Pahoran, chief judge, concerning which kind of government was the more desirable. In the voting the king-men lost, at the very moment when Amalickiah led the Lamanites against the land. When the king-men were asked to support the government, they refused. Beside himself with worry, Pahoran sent word to Moroni, in the land of Bountiful, to come posthaste to the defense of Zarahemla. Moroni came with all speed to the defense of the capital. With great loss of life and devastation, the king-men were vanquished. Mulek, fighting to the last, was finally disarmed and dragged off to prison.

CHAPTER VIII

THE engagement ended, Moroni gave orders for his men to go about clearing away the wreckage, caring for the wounded, removing the dead. Nor would he leave the field even to see to his own needs until this necessary and humane work had been well undertaken. In the cool of evening he finally sought comfort and peace after having disposed of the necessary affairs. Many of the king-men who had escaped were to be hunted down. Those who were genuinely repentant should be given opportunity to redeem themselves. Prisoners were to be carefully held and watched. Widows and orphans were to be notified of their loss.



"He glanced at the book Shiblon had left, but did not touch it."

One thing, among many others, troubled the captain. Pachus had disappeared. When Moroni received word of this, he was deeply regretful, for he knew this conflict was but the beginning, not the end, as he had dared to hope; for while the arch-traitor lived, there would be no rest for the nation. He, like Amalickiah, was all bad.

For days after the destruction of his army and the failure of his cause, Mulek was more like the fabrication of a dream than like a man of flesh and blood. He had been wounded, not severely, but many times, and infection, fever, and intense pain made heavy demands upon his strength and spirit. Through days and nights of torture he lay on his rough bed in the cell, staring upward, breathing unnaturally, neither knowing nor caring what happened, whether he was to live or to die.

When at last he was pronounced well, he was vastly altered. Physically he was but a shadow of his former self. His hair and beard had grown, and he rejected all offers to have them cut. His eyes were sunken and dull; his cheeks, thin and pale. A long livid scar showed prominently on his chin. His flesh was gone to the extent that he was wrinkled and wan. He looked like a different man. He was different.

He never smiled and seldom spoke, at no time more than was necessary for essential communication. Recovered from his delirium, he would stand for hours looking from his prison into the world outside. Loss of freedom, hope, wealth, and friends left him little in which to be interested.

THE hardest trial of all came to him one day after his recovery. He was informed that his mother, shortly after his fall, while yet he lay senseless, had died suddenly from the shock of his actions. Mulek had never had occasion or reason to think deeply about life. He had in a very real sense lived only on the edge of it. Pampered and soothed, denied the toughening experiences of the world, he had never really known what his mother had been to

him. Now he began to realize it, and the realization was harsh and cruel. It restored him in some degree to reality, and thereafter he commenced again to take interest in his surroundings.

He was not surprised that his former acquaintances and friends did not come to see him, knowing what kind of friends they were. Many of them, of course, were dead. Those who had survived, for any number of reasons, would not come. Now that he was in disfavor, now that no benefits could follow their interest, they had made other associations.



Mulek turned to the window.

He was almost wholly alone. His only contacts were with his guards and attendants who at regular intervals visited him to bring the necessities of life and to watch, after a fashion, over his welfare. Nor would he have it otherwise. He had lost everything but pride; he would keep that.

As news of the Lamanite invasion and the resulting war was brought to the capital, Mulek became more and more eager to hear of it. He began to question his guards concerning every detail. He was not sure why he was so deeply con-

cerned. He had not thought to analyze his feelings, but as the days wore on, he found himself feeling uneasy at the strength and progress of the Lamanites. This surprised him. He had supposed that he would welcome word of the discomfiture of his people, of Moroni in particular. One day, after a longer silence than usual, he called the guard and requested that his lawyer, a friend named Nephi, be brought to him.

Next day the guard, Amnigaddah, as soon as he came on duty, entered the prisoner's cell.

"It is with deep regret," he declared without preface, "that I inform you that the lawyer Nephi is dead."

"Dead? How did this come about?"

"He fell, fighting at his captain's side in the . . ." The man was about to say "recent rebellion" but coughed instead and let his voice trail off. Mulek's cheeks flamed red.

"I understand," he replied, with the air of a man who understood a great deal.

Later in the day he asked for another lawyer and gave his name. Amnigaddah did not wait for night but sent another at once to make inquiries concerning this Shazer. The messenger returned shortly with word that Shazer was fighting in the east. Everything Mulek saw or heard rebuked him, condemned him. He, too, should even now be fighting in his country's cause.

At night he asked a third time for a lawyer. "I give you leave to bring what man soever you will." He spent a sorrowful evening and a fitful night, dreaming of things that brought him only pain whether they were happy or otherwise.

Next day a lawyer was brought to him. Cezoram was an elderly man, but his mind was clear and vigorous. He walked with a limp from a Lamanite arrow lodged in his hip. He greeted the prisoner courteously and asked in what he could be of service.

"I am sorry I am unable to offer you hospitality more fitting your honor," Mulek began.

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MULEK OF ZARAHLEMLA

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"If you will be so good as to state your problem."

MULEK explained that he was interested primarily in three things: his mother's affairs, his own property and its status under the law, and whether he himself stood in any likelihood of regaining his freedom. Cezoram studied a long time before replying. He had known something of Mulek's life, and what he knew did not reassure him.

"It is very difficult," he began.

"Please speak frankly. I am aware that my position is in the last degree precarious, but we shall not improve it by refusing to see it as it is."

"My hesitation arose not from fear of plain speech," the man of law answered, "but from unwillingness to speak without more knowledge. It will be necessary for me to re-examine the law on certain points before I can advise you."

"Please be so good as to do so as soon as possible." After the visitor had gone, Mulek went back to the window where he gave himself again wholly to musing. He knew that his interest in things was returning though he could not determine just what it was that had stimulated him. As he thought about the possible future, he was confused and uncertain. He was sure he would not go back to his old way of life even if he should have the opportunity. Just what he would do, he could not tell. His black melancholy was growing upon him, increased by uncertainty. He realized that he was going through a period of crisis, not political or social, but a spiritual, emotional one. Where it would lead him or what would come of it, he could not so much as guess. One day he had sunk into one of his spells of dejection, gloomy over his dreary prospects, when he became aware that there was talking in the passage outside his cell. He heard bustling and footsteps and knew someone was coming to see him. It had been long since he had seen anyone outside the routine of his dull existence! Who could it be?

There was a deferential knock with which the guards always an-

nounced their approach, and then the prisoner heard the rattling of keys and the grating of bars. The ponderous door swung slowly back. Two men stood in the dim passageway. One was Zeniff, the guard of the day; the other was Shiblon, the missionary and prophet!

MULEK's reception of the prophet Shiblon, though it lacked little in courtesy, was anything but a warm one. He could hardly fail to remember his latest meeting with the missionary. Nor was he pleased to have Shiblon see his reduced circumstances so in contrast with his former magnificence.

His face grew hard at sight of the unexpected visitor, and he remained staring, so lost was he in memories and speculations.

"May I not enter?" Mulek shook himself out of his abstraction and apologized for his seeming rudeness. "There is no man living I had less expected to see," he said in explanation.

"That I can readily understand," the prophet replied, "but do not misunderstand my coming, nor misinterpret my motives, as I have feared thou mightest be likely to do. I have not come to mock nor to reproach thee, but to help thee if I can."

"Why, what can you do?" Mulek did not mind that he was short in his manner. "I lack nothing in the way of physical comforts that one in my place might hope to have. I seek no company. What is there else? Can you, perhaps, unsay the words you spoke when last we met?"

"Nay, Mulek, they were not my words—nor were they idle ones. I can no more recall them than thou canst retract thine own."

The prisoner turned irritably, and as he stood against the window, Shiblon marveled at the change in him. It was hard to believe that he was the same man! He was so tall and thin, so silent and thoughtful.

"Are words, then, of such great consequence?" Mulek asked.

"Yea, words are mighty to bless and to condemn, but thoughts and actions are far greater still."

"That I might well believe, but to what purpose? If we cannot call back the words, how hardly shall we

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MULEK OF ZARAHLEMA

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make our performances of no effect?"

"Mulek, my friend, why dost thou shun me?" Shiblon leaned forward in his earnestness, lines of worry on his face. "None can be more sorry for thee than I am. I would give or do anything to help thee." No one could have resisted the man's sincere words and manner.

Mulek was shamed. "Forgive my fretfulness. It is only that I am bewildered and know not what to think or do."

"That I can well believe."

SHIBLON rose and laid his hands on Mulek's arms, looking the man in the eyes. "Does not this very uncertainty cause thee to think upon that which is not transient, which does not result in bewilderment, but rather confidence? Is it that loss of station and wealth are mortal?"

"How can I say? I do not know the extent of my loss. A man may hang by a root; and if it sustains him, it is enough. When it no longer bears him up, a bridge is not adequate."

Shiblon could see that he was dispirited with a weariness not alone of the body, and, being a wise man, he decided to leave at once lest he stir the other unduly.

"I have much to do," he said. "I will leave thee something to read after I am gone. If at any time I can be of any service to thee, I shall hold thee but as a poor friend not to acquaint me with it."

"I thank you heartily."

"Good-bye. If I may, I shall call again."

"By all means do so."

After Shiblon's departure Mulek sat in deep study. He was all at once astounded at the realization that religion had meant nothing to him, that he had lived so long without having given it a serious thought. Was there after all something in all this talk about spiritual satisfaction? He was sure of one thing: he would not turn his back upon anything or anyone that could offer relief from his present gloom. He glanced at the book Shiblon had left, but he did not touch it.

THAT same day the lawyer Cezoram returned. He lost not a moment in preliminaries. He assured

Mulek that his mother's affairs were settled.

"Touching the matter of your property," he went on, "I have to advise that it is still technically yours. The disposition of it awaits the time of your trial. Meanwhile you are free to use such of it as is needed for your sustenance while you remain in confinement."

"Is there no indication as to when my case may be brought to trial?"

"None whatever. All are now much too busy for these matters. The very nation is now threatened, and universal needs must take precedence over personal considerations."

Mulek remained silent so long the visitor thought he must be forgotten.

"Do you think," he said at length, "there is any chance that the governor might pardon me and let me take an active part in the struggle for freedom?"

Though he was embarrassed, he faced his lawyer without flinching. Cezoram returned his look with equal directness. The other had not hesitated to bring the subject up; no more could he sidestep it. He smiled, though somewhat forbiddingly.

"Your record is not one to inspire confidence," he pointed out bluntly. "You overtly supported the rebel-

lion in one instance. It is strongly suspected that you were likewise active at another time in fomenting revolution. All this is the more grave in view of present conditions."

Mulek, flushed and saddened, moved about his cell.

"You are right, friend," he observed. "I can blame no one but myself. Nor is there any way in which I can give proof of my good intentions. O Cezoram, I do love this priceless land! If I cannot give my poor strength to its preservation, there is at least no reason why my resources may not be utilized for its security. Please do not deny me this. Go at once and make the necessary legal arrangements. All that I have I gladly give to my country, even if what I am is too poor an offering."

Cezoram, affected as he had not thought to be, weighed the proposal in silence, and turned to go.

"Never in my life," he declared, "have I seen a situation like this. It will demand careful study and reflection. I promise that I shall do all in my power to do as you have bidden me do. Is there anything else in which I can be of service?"

"Later, perhaps. You have been most kind," and Mulek turned back to the window.

(To be continued)

THE GENERAL BOARD OF THE Y.W.M.I.A.

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she has served as a member of the Riverside Stake Sunday School board in charge of teacher training work. She has been assigned to serve on the Junior and Camping committees of the general board of the Y.W.M.I.A.. A graduate of the L.D.S. Business College, she served as secretary to Dr. Adam S. Bennion when he was superintendent of the Church schools, as secretary in the office of the Council of the Twelve, and is at present secretary in the office of the First Presidency.

CAROL H. CANNON has had much experience in the various departments of the Mutual, both in a ward and in a stake capacity. She served as ward secretary, Junior leader, drama director, counselor, and president of a ward in Utah Stake; acted as secretary to the stake board of the same stake. She

is a graduate of the Normal Department of Brigham Young University. After her family moved to Salt Lake, she was Junior and Gleaner leader as well as president of the Liberty Stake Y.W.M.I.A. board. She was called to the general board in 1944, on which she has been chairman of the Junior committee, the committee which she will still head under her new appointment. She is the wife of Tracy Y. Cannon, director of the McCune School of Music and Art, whom she married in the Salt Lake Temple. She is at the present time secretary to the General Music Committee.

VIRGINIA F. CUTLER has had wide academic experience in Utah, California, and New York, receiving her B.S. degree from the U. of U., her Master's degree from Stanford, and her Ph.D. from Cornell, in addition to attending the Vassar