

Chapter 1

THE BELOVED SEER

THE book of Daniel is pre-eminently a book for aspiring and ambitious youth. It contains many interesting and startling episodes; adventures with perils and pitfalls are depicted in almost every chapter. Accounts of dangerous hazards and daring heroes face every red-blooded, exploring boy or girl who will prayerfully peruse this inspired document. Plots and counterplots of corrupt and villainous men are again and again thwarted in behalf of four plucky, steadfast youth, who feared none but God, and hated nothing but sin.

First is the story of the hasty invasion of old Jerusalem by the conquering cohorts of the king, with cruel rending of hearts and homes, and hurried and unhappy farewells. Then follows the painful exit from the doomed city, and the long trek over the burning sands of the Syrian Desert, from the Holy City to faraway Babylon. Those dreary days and sleepless nights find the four lonesome lads farther away from temple and teacher, and nearer an untried career in Chaldean captivity.

Then comes the strange matriculation in the famous College of the Chaldees, and the tactful request for a diet of beans and water, instead of beef and wine. After the ten days of rigid test, Daniel and his companions are found fairer and fatter than all their favored and faded classmates. There is arranged a private and secluded table for the quartet of resolute Hebrew boys who are in Babylon, but are not of Babylon, who dare to be different.

At once there begins a three years' course in the Seminary of Shinar, where they study lore, language, and legislation. Here even royalty comes under the powerful spell of these four beardless youth. Then there is the stiff final examination, the thrilling graduation, and the glorious promotion for the resolute four. The grades from the king show them to be ten times better than the best. They stand without a compeer, having a faith in God undiluted by pagan philosophy.

There are dreams, visions, and images. There is the vast throng kneeling before the golden image, all except three stiff-kneed lads, who have grit as well as grace, and pluck as well as piety. Next we see the fiery furnace, where the king's rage is as hot as the flames he has had

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kindled. But the captives are seen treading the white, burning coals as if they were beds of roses.

Who is not thrilled by reading about the symbolic tree towering toward heaven, overshadowing the whole earth, and cut down by the “holy watcher;” and of the stump that has a band of iron and brass fastened securely around it? There is the haughty monarch parading on the parapets of his palace, when his reason is dethroned and he is sent out among the cattle, under the weird spell of zoanthropy, until “his hairs were grown like eagles’ feathers, and his nails like birds’ claws.” From Babylon to beasts, from glory to grass, is but a short road for the king, and it is quickly traveled.

Behold that fatal night, at Babylon’s last banquet, when Belshazzar, with a thousand lords, and as many ladies, with cavaliers and concubines, servants and slaves, quaff the wine of Babylon from the cups of beneficence. Suddenly, from out of the black sleeve of darkness there is thrust the dread hand that moves upon the wall, pauses, then traces the words that foretell the awful doom of the besotted Belshazzar, the last ruler of the golden kingdom.

Daniel might not have understood the modern Bertillon system of reading human fingerprints on paper; but he could decipher the mystic and divine fingerprints on the palace plaster.

There is the open lattice on the west side of the upper room, the three prayers each day by the man with whom no fault could be found. There are the jealous presidents and princes, the duped king, and the twice-sealed cave in the royal gardens where the prophet spent a peaceful night amid cruel lions. But on this occasion they are as gentle as when Adam named the first pair that passed before him in Eden.

Again the dreaming seer watches a lion, a bear, a leopard, and the furious beast with wings, heads, and horns. The dimming curtains of futurity are pulled aside, and, like a living panorama, battling beasts appear on the banks of the old Ulai River. In prophetic vision Daniel sees the kings of the north and south. And finally the old Hebrew prophet, weary, watchful, and waiting, goes his blessed way, to stand in his lot at the end of the days.

Best of all, the record of the sacred scroll is true. It is a book that will inspire the youth, for it is a book of inspiration. It tells about a man who was as true as steel, who would rather suffer than sin. Babylon might change Daniel’s name, but not his character. Pagan lore could not denature him; Chaldean royalty could not denationalize him. He

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took the Commandments of God with him into captivity, and he became a veritable Decalogue to all who knew him.

In the better land, people of all ages doubtless will inquire for the old seer of the Ulai, whose large heart always throbbed with love for his God. The children will love to follow the man who spent a whole night in the lions' den. The youth will seek him, who, when in Babylon, did as the Babylonians should have done. The adult will ask for the man who did not wait until the leaves of life were brittle with age to begin turning them. And the aged will companion with him who held constant communion with the Holy Watcher.

Talk about adventure! Where could the youth of today find literature more thrilling and inspiring than this little volume of only twelve chapters? It is the children's storybook, the youth's guidebook, the student's textbook, the adult's counsel book, and the patriarch's glory book. And to all who would understand the future it is the blessed Apocalypse of the Old Testament.

The curtain rises in old Babylon in 606 B. C, remains up for more than two thousand five hundred years, and will fall when the hand of the Almighty writes "finis" on the last page of this world's history.

Daniel's prophetic watchtower, from which he beheld kingdoms win and wane, was near the royal chamber of Babylon's monarch. A pillow was his throne, a staff was his scepter, and the generations of earth were his subjects. At night he would launch out upon the vast sea of futurity, and return with cargoes of richest treasure, of which we are still learning. Daniel arose to great prominence in two empires, stood unflinching on dizzy heights, and ever retained his steadfastness and purity. Out of the thousands of captives, there was only one Daniel.

Daniel is one of the very few men in the Bible of whom no evil is recorded. In this book he was familiarly known as the one "greatly beloved," an endearing term applied to him three times. The only fault that one hundred twenty-two jealous and corrupt politicians of Babylon could find with him was "concerning the law of his God."

He lived in a bad place, among a bad people, in a bad time; yet his life was pure. Old Babylon could not alter the course of this stouthearted Hebrew youth. His courage and heroism had no stimulus from without. He was encouraged by no enthusiastic spectators, he was cheered by no plaudits, he was not accompanied by bands of martial music. Yet he stood, like a giant storm-swept oak on the hillside, and steadily grew toward heaven.

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For centuries carping critics have assailed the little book of Daniel, but their broadsides have all been futile. This beacon of prophecy continues to illumine the future. Daniel lighted a holy lamp whose beams have penetrated the darkness of twenty-five centuries. The Stone which he saw “cut out of the mountain without hands” will some day crush all the arrogant aliens to the promise.

Daniel’s thrilling prophecies cover in detail a greater span of the world’s history than any other in the sacred Scriptures. They extend from old Babylon to the New Jerusalem; from the stormy sea, where the four beasts arose, to the sea of glass, where will stand the victors over the beast and his image. In eight short verses he writes the history of the world, from his day to the end of time.

Daniel spent some seventy years in old Babylon. His faithful service in two empires spanned the period of the Jewish captivity. He did not return to the land of his birth, which was known to him by the endearing term, “the pleasant land.” His undimmed light shone for threescore and ten years in the wicked metropolis. Never once, even for a moment, was his flame hidden under a bushel.

The Lord gave the old seer favor with the Babylonian rulers, especially with Cyrus, who gave the decree for rebuilding the temple at Jerusalem. There was great rejoicing, and hurried preparations for the long-anticipated return to the fair Land of Promise. But the old prophet remained in Babylon, and at last, still praying with his window open toward Jerusalem, he lay down to rest.

The great Lover of men said to the silver-haired sage, “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.” His work was done, and his mission was ended. Some glad day in the beautiful beyond he will stand, not in old Babylon, but in his lot in fair Canaan beyond the swelling Jordan.