

**THE
TRIUMPH OVER
MIDIAN**

Table of Contents

PREFACE

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

CHAPTER IX.

CHAPTER X.

CHAPTER XI.

CHAPTER XII.

CHAPTER XIII.

CHAPTER XIV.

CHAPTER XV.

CHAPTER XVI.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHAPTER XX.

CHAPTER XXI.

CHAPTER XXII.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHAPTER XXVI.

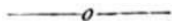
CONCLUSION.

THE TRIUMPH OVER MIDIAN



GIDEON'S NIGHT ATTACK ON THE MIDIANITES

PREFACE



In attempting to illustrate the history of the victory of Gideon, I am conscious that I am entering on well-trodden ground. Others have gathered the lessons and examined the types with which that portion of the Scripture-field is so richly studded. I lay claim to little originality of thought on the subject which I have chosen. A humble task has been mine; that of endeavouring to show that the same faith by which heroes of old *out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens*, is still, as the gift of God's grace, bestowed on the lowliest Christian. Writing, as I have done, under the depressing influence of domestic sorrow, and the languor of weak health, I feel how very imperfectly I have executed my task; but I humbly commend my little work to Him who despiseth not the feeble, and whose blessing on the humblest instrument can make it effectual in His service.

A. L. O. E.

CHAPTER I.

THE RETURN.

Home, once more at home!" how joyful sounded the exclamation from the lips of Edith Lestrangle, and how brightly sparkled her eyes as she uttered it, as, with a step light as a fawn's, she revisited each spot which five years' absence had only made more dear. With joyous impatience she ascended the broad oaken staircase of Castle Lestrangle, to flit like a fairy from room to room, lingering longest in the old nursery, where she had known childhood's pleasures, with not a few of its sorrows—and the playroom, in which her toys were still stored. There was the doll that had been to her as a companion, to which the lonely little heiress had whispered many a trouble; the pretty picture-books, the miniature tea-things of delicate china, that had been such sources of amusement. It was a pleasure to Edith, from recollections of "auld lang syne," to touch and handle these childish treasures, though at the age of eleven she deemed herself no longer a child.

Then to the newly-returned traveller how great were the delights of the garden and the park,—the one bright with the flowers of spring, the other donning its light green robe, while in the sheltered mossy dells fragrance of violets filled the air. Edith almost wondered that the light-footed deer should bound away on her approach: her heart felt so full of joy and kindness, that it seemed strange that any living creature should fear her. The heiress of Lestrangle took pleasure in visiting the cottage of her father's steward, where the familiar faces of Holdich and his wife were as the faces of old friends, bright with hearty welcome. Her canary, cared for by Mrs.

Holdich during her absence, was tamer than ever, and its quivering notes of delight seemed to its youthful mistress an echo of the music of happiness which sounded within her own soul.

For Edith did not return to the castle of her ancestors as she had left it five years before—a feeble, fragile invalid. She no longer painfully dragged her weary limbs along, with languor oppressing her spirits; springing and elastic was the step which now bounded over the mossy turf. The cheeks that had been almost as colourless as the snowdrop, had now a faint dawn of colour upon them, like that on the opening buds of the apple-blossom. Edith was still a delicate plant, like an exotic reared in a hot-house, but an exotic skilfully tended, expanding its petals in healthful life.

“Oh, how true it is that there is no place like home!” exclaimed Edith, as she sauntered up the broad avenue, with sunshine on her path, and the blue cloud-flecked sky smiling above her.

The observation was addressed to her cousin, Isa Gritton, who was spending a day at the Castle, a short time after the return of Sir Digby Lestrangle and his daughter. Isa was a young lady whose age might be about two or three and twenty, and who might therefore have scarcely been deemed a suitable companion for one so youthful as Edith, had not the little heiress possessed a mind so early matured by the discipline of trial that she was scarcely regarded as a child by those who intimately knew her. Isa Gritton was a tall and graceful girl, with auburn hair, and eyes like those of the gazelle—large, soft, and expressive: mirroring each passing emotion, whether it were that of mirth and gladness, or, as was now the case, a shadow of painful thought.

“Do you not feel with me,” said Edith, “that there is a charm in the very name of *home*?”



THE COUSINS.

“I did so once,” replied Isa, with a sigh; “but for the last two years, since the loss of my dear father, I cannot be said to have had a real home.”

“But you have one now, dear Isa,” said Edith; “and oh, how glad I am that your brother chose to build one at Wildwaste, so near us. Why, even I—who never perform great feats in the walking line—will be able to manage the distance on foot; it is barely a mile, I

hear. I dare say that Mr. Gritton kindly chose the site of his house there on purpose that you might be near your uncle and cousin. To meet you often, very often, will be such a pleasure to me; I shall feel as if I had at last what I have so often longed for, a sister to share all my sorrows and joys. I will soon return your visit, and you shall show me your brother's new house. Has he not built a charming retreat, with a pretty garden and shrubbery round it?"

Isa Gritton laughed: but there was a little bitterness in the laugh. "Tastes differ," she replied; "and Gaspar having been his own architect, he doubtless admires his work. But my ideal of beauty is hardly realized by a house that looks as if a geni had transplanted it bodily from one of the smaller streets of London, in all the newness of yellowish brick as yet undarkened by soot, and had dropped it on the edge of a morass—not a tree within half a mile of it—where it stands staring out of its blindless windows as if wondering how it came there, with nothing to remind it of London but the great soap manufactory, which is the most conspicuous object in the view, the smoke of which might do duty for that of a whole street in the city."

"How could Mr. Gritton build such a house, and in such a place!" exclaimed Edith in surprise; "I could not fancy you in a home that was not pretty and picturesque. I have no clear remembrance of Wildwaste save as a wide flat common sprinkled with gorse, for I seldom or never visited the hamlet when I was a little child."

"You will scarcely care to visit it often now, except out of compassion for me," said Isa, smiling. "Mr. Eardley tells me, however, that Wildwaste, bad as it is, is greatly improved from what it was some years ago, when it had nothing in the shape of a school."

“Mr. Eardley—then you know him?” cried Edith, brightening at the mention of the pastor whom she revered and loved.

“Yes,” replied Isa; “though, Wildwaste not being in the parish of Axe, we do not belong to his flock. Mr. Eardley had heard, through your steward’s wife, I believe, that we wanted a girl to help in the house. He called to recommend to us a young protégée of his own, a black-eyed gipsy-looking little creature, who blushes scarlet when she is spoken to, and seems to be afraid of the sound of her own voice. I think, however, that with a little training Lottie Stone will suit us very well.”

“Do you not like Mr. Eardley?” said Edith, looking as if assured that the answer must be in the affirmative.

“Very much; I wish that he were our clergyman instead of Mr. Bull, who must be nearly eighty years old, and who—but I don’t think it well to criticize preachers.”

“We attend the service at Axe—we drive there, for it is much too far off for a walk,” said Edith Lestrangle. “You shall come with us every Sunday—that is to say,” she added, with a little hesitation, “if you don’t mind leaving your brother. Papa does not like more than three in the carriage.”

“Perhaps I ought not to leave Gaspar,” said Isa, gravely; and she added, but not aloud, “if I were not with him, I fear that he would not go to a place of worship at all.—No, Edith,” she said to her cousin, “I am afraid that I cannot accompany you to Axe on Sundays, but I have promised Mr. Eardley to bring Lottie twice a week to the little cottage-lectures which he gives in the dwelling of Holdich the steward.”

“Then we shall always meet there,” observed Edith. “I have such a sweet remembrance of those cottage-meetings, though I was such a little girl when I went to them that of course I could not understand all that I heard. I felt as if there were such peace, and holiness, and Christian kindness in that quiet home-church, where young and old, and rich and poor, gathered to hear God’s truth, and pray and praise together. And Holdich himself is such a good man,” continued Edith warmly: “it is not merely that he does not mind openly confessing his religion—whatever people may think of it—but that he lives up to what he professes. Papa went on the Continent, you know, rather in haste, and there had been a little confusion in his affairs, and no time to set them right. Papa was always so generous, and those about him had abused his confidence so sadly.”

“Yes, I heard something of that,” observed Isa, who, like the rest of the world, was aware that Sir Digby’s ostentatious extravagance had plunged him into pecuniary difficulties, and that change of air for his invalid child, though the ostensible, had not been the only cause of his retreat.

“But Holdich has brought everything into such beautiful order,” continued Edith,—“he has quite surprised papa by the way in which he has managed the estate. He has cared for his master’s interests as much, I think *more* than if they had been his own. Papa used to suspect people who had the name of being very pious, but he said this morning at breakfast, ‘A man like my steward, who brings his Christianity into his daily dealings, does more to convince infidels of the real power of faith than all the learned books that ever were written.’ I treasured up the words to repeat them to Holdich’s wife. I think that she and her husband are the

happiest people that I know, and especially now that their son is doing so well as a schoolmaster under Mr. Eardley.”

“The subject of the new series of cottage-lectures is to be Gideon’s Triumph over Midian,” observed Isa.

“And the first is to begin at seven this evening,” said Edith. “Papa has given me leave to be always present—at least when the weather is fine; and some of our servants will go too. They are not all able to get to church on Sundays, for Axe is five miles from the Castle.”

The cousins, slowly sauntering up the avenue, had now reached a grassy mound at the end of it, on which a tall weather-cock stood, and which might be ascended by a flight of marble steps. Having mounted these steps, a very extensive and beautiful prospect lay before Isa and Edith, while a rural seat invited them to rest and enjoy it.

“I have looked upon many lovely views in Italy,” observed Edith, as her eye wandered with delight over the scene; “but, to my mind, there is none to compare with this. I always missed that dear little spire seen in the distance yonder, where I knew that Sunday after Sunday the real truth was preached in my own native tongue by a servant of God. It always seems to me with Mr. Eardley as if he were like the disciples, who went to their Master and had their directions in the morning straight from His lips; and that in the evening, when his labour was over, he would go and ‘tell Jesus’ all that he had done, and all that he had tried to do—receive the Lord’s smile and His blessing, and then lie down to rest at His feet.”

“It seems so with some clergymen,” said Isa. “When they feed the people with the bread of the Word, we feel that they have just taken it from the hands of the Lord—that He has given thanks, and blessed, and broken it; so that we look from the servant to the Master, and realize that the ministry of the gospel is hallowed service indeed.”



CHAPTER II.

BROKEN BUBBLES.

So you especially enjoyed your stay at Florence,” said Isa, after the conversation had taken a less serious turn.

“I was very happy there; it was so beautiful, and we knew such very nice people. I should have liked to have stayed there much longer.”

“And why did you not remain there?” asked Isa. “Did not Sir Digby enjoy Florence too?”

“Very much indeed, until—until a lady came to stay there who spoilt all his pleasure in the place.”

“How was that?” said Isa.

“Why, the lady was witty; at least people said so; but if her kind of talking was wit, I wish that there were no such thing in the world. All her delight seemed to be to gossip and make her friends merry; and so long as they laughed, she did not much mind what they laughed at. You see,” continued Edith in a confidential tone, “her mother had lived in the Castle, and she talked a great deal about that. Now, of course, it was quite right and noble in papa to let strangers come here while we were away—and there had been difficulties, as you know—but he did not like its being talked about to every one.”

Isa could easily comprehend that her proud uncle had been very sensitive on the subject of the letting of his ancestral mansion.

“And then,” pursued Edith, “she mixed up what was true with what was not true; and how could strangers tell whether she spoke in jest or in earnest? She said that papa had been harsh and violent to his servants; and that was shamefully false!” exclaimed the girl, with a flush of indignation on the face usually so gentle and calm—“he had been only too indulgent and trustful. In short, this lady made Florence so unpleasant by her gossip, that papa could bear it no longer. He said that he would never willingly be for a day in the same city with Cora Madden.”

“Cora Madden!” repeated Isa, with a little start; and Edith, who had been looking up at her cousin, saw with surprise a stern, gloomy expression pass over her countenance like a shadow.

“Do you know Miss Madden?” inquired the baronet’s daughter.

“Do I know her?” repeated Isa slowly, with her hazel eyes bent on the ground. Then suddenly she raised them, as she uttered the abrupt question, “Edith, do you know what it is to hate?”

“Hate? no, not exactly,” replied the gentle girl; “but there are some persons whom I do not like at all—some with whom I feel angry at times. I was angry with Miss Madden one day when she was laughing at Mr. Eardley, and mimicking his manner. I thought her doing so was so silly, so wrong. Besides, rudeness to one’s friends tries one’s patience a great deal more than unkindness to one’s self.”

“Cora reminds me of the description of the wicked in the Psalms,” observed Isa—“*They shoot out their arrows, even bitter words.*” She cares little where the darts alight, or how deep they may pierce.”

Edith, who had a very tender conscience, was very doubtful whether such an application of a text from Scripture was consistent with Christian charity. Without venturing, however, to reprove, she merely observed in her gentle tone, "I am sorry that I spoke of Cora at all. It was breaking a rule which I had made."

"What is your rule?" asked Isa.

"Never to speak of those whom I cannot like, except to God," replied Edith.

"And what do you say of them to God?"

"Oh, if I speak of them to God, I must speak *for* them," answered little Edith; "I dare not do anything else, for the Lord has told us to love our enemies, and we could not bring malice into our prayers."

"Yours is a good rule, darling," said Isa, and she turned to imprint a kiss on the forehead of her cousin. "Let us speak no more of Cora Madden, and may God help us to obey the most difficult command contained in all the Bible!"

To explain why the command appeared such a hard one to the young maiden—why the very name of Cora called up bitter remembrances to her mind—it is needful that I should let the reader know something of the previous history of Isa Gritton.

Like her cousin Edith, Isa had early lost her mother, and had been the only daughter in her father's home; but otherwise there had been little resemblance between the early childhood of the two. Edith, a crippled, suffering invalid, had been the uncomplaining victim of nursery oppression; and in her splendid mansion had had more to endure than many of the children of the poor. Isa, on the contrary, fondly tended by a devoted nurse, herself strong,

vigorous, and full of spirits, had found her childhood flow pleasantly past, like a stream dimpling in sunshine and bordered with flowers. Isa had scarcely known what it was to feel weary, sick, or sad. Her father called her his little lark, made only to sing and to soar. She was beloved by all who knew the bright, playful child, and her affectionate nature disposed her to love all in return. The religion which was carefully instilled into Isa partook of the joyful character of her mind. Isa was troubled by no doubts and few fears. The thoughts of heaven and bliss which were suggested to her, were congenial to the spirit of the child. Isa looked forward to the joys of Paradise without letting imagination dwell either on the dark valley or “the narrow stream.” Her idea of death was simply a peaceful removal to a yet brighter and happier home.

There were some spiritual dangers attending this existence of ease and joy. The very sweetness of Isa’s disposition dimmed her perception of inward corruption. If she was tempted to make an idol of self, it was an idol so fair that she scarcely recognized it as one. Sometimes, indeed, Isa’s conscience would accuse her of vanity as she lingered before her mirror, surveying with girlish pleasure the smiling image within it, or recalled words of fond admiration, or committed some little extravagance in regard to dress, for Isa at that time had a weakness for dress. But the accusation was made in a whisper so soft, that it scarcely disturbed her serenity. It affected her conduct, however; for on the day when Isa first received a regular allowance of her own, she made on her knees a resolution which never was broken—not to spend money on the adornment of her person without devoting an equal sum to the relief of the poor. Thus early the love of God combated the love of the world; a bridle was placed upon vanity, which was still but a bridle of flowers; for Isa felt as much pleasure in helping the

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