

**FOR THE
KING'S SAKE**

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For the King's Sake by Ferdinand Q. Blanchard

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THE CHILD FROM BETHLEHEM

UPON the clustered white houses of the village of Bethlehem the late afternoon sun shone brightly down. A gentle northwest breeze swept over the spur of hills on which the village rested, but even with this relief the heat was extreme. The long, narrow street running the length of the village was deserted, while in the market place the only signs of life were a couple of donkeys tied before the entrance to the inn and three or four dogs stretched out asleep where patches of shadow were cast by the low buildings. The men of Bethlehem were almost all employed at

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this season in the farmlands about the village. The women had completed their simple household tasks and it was not yet time to busy themselves with the duties of the evening when the men would return from their labor. So the little town rested for the most part in a condition of drowsy quiet.

But one searching for the people would occasionally find a household group gathered together. Near the southern end of the main street a short lane ran eastwards for a few rods to the point where the descent to the valley began. In the grateful shade of the house terminating the row upon one side of the lane were seated two women. Resting in the lap of one a bright-eyed baby laughed and cooed and waved its arms in aimless content, while close beside them was a little girl busied in trying to coax some sleepy doves that perched on the eaves of the house to

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eat the grain she had scattered on the ground.

Before the group was outspread a scene of rare beauty. In the farther distance the land fell away by ridges of wilderness country to the great depth of the Salt Sea, but just below the village were olive orchards and vineyards, green meadows and pastures where sheep were browsing. In all Judea a picture of greater peace and plenty was not to be found.

At last the little girl wearied of her fruitless attempts to induce the birds to leave their roost. Taking her stand by her mother she waited until there was a pause in the conversation, and then said:

"Mother, tell me a story."

"A story, Elizabeth. What shall I tell you?"

"I want to hear the story of Ruth and then of her little grandson, David."

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"Why, you know those stories," the mother returned. "I have told you those many times."

"Yes, but I want to hear them again. And while you tell me I can play that one of those women down there is the good Ruth, and afterwards we can make believe that our house is right where David's father lived."

So the mother consented. She told of Ruth, the fair woman of Moab, who lives in the thought of the ages as the type of faithfulness, while down on the waving wheat-fields the gleaners made real the scenes of the old romance. Then she went on to tell of the brave, high-spirited youth who became Israel's greatest hero, and the unchanged surroundings of his boyish days rendered it easy to picture his life amid the very pasture lands upon which the listener's eyes were resting.

The woman had finished her tales of

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the long ago and her companion, Judith, had taken the baby in her arms preparatory to returning to her own adjoining house, when suddenly down the narrow lane there came rushing in hot haste an eager, excited boy.

Without waiting to catch his breath he flung himself against Judith and burst out:

"Mother, oh mother, the soldiers are coming! They are coming right now and they are going to kill little Asa. I saw them and Gracchus told me so!"

"Joseph, what are you saying? Stop your crying and tell me," Judith said sharply; but a look of fright had taken possession of her face and she was holding the baby with unconscious vehemence to her breast. It was a day when the restless, uncurbed passions in the heart of the evil old man who ruled as king made every Jew feel that nothing in all the land was sacred and safe.