

THE
WOMEN OF THE BIBLE;

DELINEATED IN A SERIES OF

SKETCHES OF PROMINENT FEMALES

MENTIONED IN

HOLY SCRIPTURE.

BY CLERGYMEN OF THE UNITED STATES.

ILLUSTRATED BY EIGHTEEN CHARACTERISTIC STEEL ENGRAVINGS.

EDITED BY

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J E Z E B E L .

MODERN biography alone furnishes us with portraits, in which the minutest characteristics are given with elaborate detail. Without any such detail in the case of the "cursed woman" (2 Kings ix. 34) who is the subject of our brief memoir, we are obliged to complete her character as naturalists complete an imperfect skeleton of some remote age. The incidents in her history which have been handed down to us, though few, are sufficiently marked to decide at once to what species the monster remains belong: and further, the labor of restoration is rendered comparatively easy by the fact, that the race of Jezebel has constantly reappeared in history, nor is it even yet extinct.

The daughter, the wife, and the mother of kings, we may beforehand expect to find in her certain characteristics, which have ever since been too common in the regal families of the world, especially during those periods when royal prerogative was considered a divine gift which raised its possessor above human opinions and laws. Absolute power has ordinarily gone hand in hand with gigantic crime, dispensing as well with the laws of God as with the rights of man. What has been the history of morals in royal courts? And if an improvement in this respect be visible in our days, do we not owe it to the increased purity and energy of popular opinion?

“If,” says an acute observer of the last century—“if vast crimes are not now in fashion, it is only because despotism is generally exploded. Give human nature scope, and it can still be sublimely abominable.”* We have only to consider, in addition, that the court of Zidon (a commercial city of Phœnicia on the coast of the Mediterranean, now called Saide, where were worshipped Baal or Bel, and Ashtoreth or Astarte, the eastern Venus), was the home of Jezebel, and we are prepared to find that the princess whom the king of Israel married, proved to be neither a pure woman, a just ruler, or a good wife.

Ahab, himself an evil-disposed man, may have wedded her for her beauty, or possibly from expediency, the motive of most royal marriages. It is not likely that he foreknew the unscrupulous self-will which she afterwards manifested, and which made her not only the despot of the nation, but the master of her husband. But however that may be, this marriage was itself a great crime, for Jezebel was probably the first avowed pagan who had been raised to the throne of Israel. Not only did his own evil dispositions receive a powerful impetus from the influence of such a companion—she corrupted the whole nation by her idolatries and witchcrafts. It was little more than a century since the sweet singer sat upon the throne of Israel, and less than half a century since Jeroboam carried the ten tribes into revolt. Ahab was the sixth in succession from Jeroboam, who, until the accession of Ahab, was spoken of as the model of royal wickedness. But Ahab, we are told, excelled all his predecessors. While the worst that could be said of them was that they walked in the steps of Jeroboam, of Ahab it is said that “he did evil in the sight of Jehovah above all that went before him,” and, “as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam, he took to wife

* Horace Walpole, than whom few better understood the history of royalty.

Jezebel (as we would now say Izebel), the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians, and went and served Baal and worshipped him." This was his great crime, because it led to the open establishment of an idolatrous system which through her agency rivalled and in the end nearly exterminated the worship of Jehovah. Until now kings and people had contented themselves with that qualified form of idolatry, which consisted in paying certain honors to the two golden calves which Jeroboam had set up in Bethel and Dan, for the purpose of drawing off the people from the temple at Jerusalem. These were not precisely idols, in the worst sense of that word, but rather symbolical representatives of the true God, Jehovah Elohim. Baal, however, was not a symbol but a rival of the God of Israel, and the establishment of his worship with its costly and depraving accompaniments, was a vast stride in the downward progress of the nation.

Before we proceed to unfold the character of the corrupt woman who was the chief agent in this monstrous revolution, a word or two may not be amiss in regard to that proclivity to idol-worship which seems to be a universal tendency of human beings. Those who live under the Christian light find it difficult to enter fully into the mental processes by which a people like the Hebrews, whose laws and institutes were so explicit, and whose previous history was one series of supernatural attestations of the grand truths of the Divine Unity, Spirituality, and Purity, were led away into the insane absurdities, to say nothing of the impious depravities, of polytheism. Undoubtedly the secret of all false worships, and of idolatry among the rest, is the reluctance of the fallen soul to be habitually brought into contact with the holy Spirit of Goodness, when presented in his full-orbed character, judicial as well as paternal. "Men *like* not to retain God in their knowledge," and yet must have some object of reverence to satisfy their ineradicable religious instincts. It is not at once,

but gradually, that they can abandon a spiritual system, and materialize and sensualize the grand ideal. First, under the plea of representing that ideal more impressively by means of visible symbols, they choose some one or more of the objects of creation, the grandeur, beauty, or utility of which is supposed to make them suitable representatives of the attributes of the great Maker. Acting upon this principle, they can be at no loss for symbols—for which of God's works does not come under the one or the other of these characters? The sun, with all the host of heaven, the elements, and innumerable other objects, down to the calf, the onion, and even more ignoble idols of Egypt, were first introduced as symbols of the attributes of the Great Supreme.

Without attempting to describe the whole process, let it be observed that the passage from this pantheism, which regards every thing in God and God in every thing, to polytheism, which ascribes a separate individuality to the objects of worship, is accomplished with comparative ease. They have a natural affinity. Without discarding the idea of a Supreme, it is only to suppose his will executed not directly but mediately by agents, themselves a lofty race of beings with appropriate functions. The honor paid to these is professedly subordinate, and not intended to degrade but rather to exalt the Supreme, just as a monarch is made more glorious by the extent of his court and the reverence paid to them. Only set the imagination free from the restraint of that grand truth which is the basis of all truths—that “Jehovah our God is One Jehovah, and that there is none else”—and the process of god-creating becomes fascinating, and well-nigh interminable. It cannot be denied that much inventive skill and poetic beauty have been employed in the peopling of every pantheon, and chiefly that of Greece. Jove, Supreme, Father of gods and men, retains a theoretic supremacy, sending forth and governing

all things by the agency of minor deities, who severally take Heaven and Hell, and the Earth with its mountains, seas, rivers, woods, and fields, together with the various interests of man, under their special direction and patronage. No wonder that thirty thousand gods ultimately shared the homage of the Greeks.

On the moral effects of such a theory when reduced to practice, it is not necessary to enlarge. The morals of polytheism have uniformly been even worse than its theoretic philosophy, if indeed it can be said to have aught of the latter. Without exception, all pagan mythologies demonstrate the truth, that in the act of degrading God man most effectually demoralizes himself. For one who will select for his worship the purer creations of the polytheistic fancy, there are tens of thousands who will choose the baser. What pantheon does not abound in gods many and lords many, stained with the vilest pollutions? What human passion or appetite, what base function of the body, has not been dignified and a sanctioned indulgence secured to it, by assigning to it some patron deity? Is the worshipper likely to be purer than the god he worships?

The Phœnician mythology (traces of which are to be found to this day in the remains and superstitious usages of some parts of the British Isles, and which Jezebel was the means of establishing in Israel), was not an exception to the above remarks. The shrines of Bel or Baal smoked with the blood of human sacrifices, while the worship of Astarte or Astaroth the patron goddess of the Sidonians, may be best understood by referring to that of her compeer, the Cyprian Venus, and to the unutterable depravities which made one of the principal seats of her worship—the groves of Daphne, near Corinth—proverbial even in Greece. Doubtless the groves established in Israel by Jezebel, were similar in character.

To have permitted the gradual introduction of such gods to inter-

fere with and at last displace the worship of Jehovah, was indeed a token of deep depravity on the part of the Israelites. But let us be just to them. Are they singular in betraying this tendency to materialize and sensualize religion? This conflict between the spiritual worship of the one exclusive God, and the worship of inferior deities — has it ceased even now under the bright sun of Christian truth? No: the disposition of the weak and guilty human soul to throw itself upon some patron guardianship, which shall not be so remote nor so holy as the Supreme Spirit, is visibly at work in the Christian church at this hour. This has multiplied intercessors and patrons of various powers and attractions, until the calendar is overloaded with them: from the virgin mother of our Lord, down to the last dead saint canonized by papal authority. The same subtle spirit runs through the Christian as through the Pagan polytheism, with this difference, that the objects of reverence in the former case have generally a purer character, and that the superstition which honors them as mediators and patrons, is therefore not quite so pernicious in its effects upon individual and social morals. Until, however, their shrines and images and rituals are abolished as an opprobrium to the glorious system which owns but “One God and one Mediator between God and man,” we have little cause to wonder at the infatuation which in a less privileged era honored the golden calf of Jero-boam, or bowed down to the idols established by Jezebel.

We now return more immediately to the subject of our memoir. In the matter of her false gods, Jezebel appears to have been a thorough propagandist. Not content to worship them herself, not even content to seduce her husband to join her and openly to deny the God of Israel, she resolved with all the energy of her domineering character, to extend their spiritual dominion over the whole

nation, to the final expulsion of the worship of Jehovah. The tolerance of polytheism has been vehemently praised, by some who hate the intolerance of Christian truth. And it is true that Greece and Rome willingly made room for the gods of every land. Athens erected an altar even to an "unknown god." But this liberality ceased the moment the claims of the true Jehovah were presented, and was succeeded by the fiery persecutions of the Emperors. Between congenial altars there need be no rivalry. But Jehovah must be God alone. "His glory will he not give to another, neither his praise to graven images." Jezebel felt all the antipathy of an idolater to the exclusive claims of "Him that is higher than the highest." She declared a relentless war against his altars, and persuaded her husband to second her with the force of his authority. Her influence was that of a strong will over a will often rendered irresolute by the remaining power of conscience. Ahab was not ignorant of the history of his people. He knew that there was danger in the undertaking—that Jehovah was to be feared;—the greater his guilt for yielding to the fierce bigotry of this relentless woman. Their relative share of guilt in this matter is forcibly indicated in the words of the historian: "there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of Jehovah, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up." Had we the skill displayed by our great poet in the interview between the hesitating Macbeth and his more ruthless partner, in which she *stirs him up* to the murder of his guest, we might tell how Jezebel employed all the blandishments of her sex, all that innate tact which belongs to the female character, to overcome the remaining scruples of her husband—now persuading, now appealing to his pride and courage, now taunting him for his cowardice, until she succeeds in deadening his fear of the God of his fathers, even so far as to gain his consent to the murder

of all the prophets of the Lord, because they stood in the way of her ambitious fanaticism. How many she put to death we are not informed; but that it was a large number, may be safely inferred from the circumstance that a hundred prophets at least escaped her vengeance at the time, having been hidden in a cave by a faithful believer. These, too, subsequently disappeared by violence, until Elijah was left the sole survivor of the teachers of Israel.

This devotion to her country's gods came so near to a complete triumph, that we learn that Elijah stood alone during the memorable scenes on Mount Carmel, while the false prophets, the minions of the wicked queen, who sustained them at her expense in every part of the land, numbered eight hundred and fifty. Her success with the people was corresponding. The eye of God, more keen than the eye of the desponding Elijah, could discover in all Israel, only 7000 who had not been seduced or terrified into a complete or partial conformity to the royal example. Who can imagine the terror which must have pervaded the land before such a result could be reached! Into how many households did her name carry alarm! She too had armies at her command, to dragoon the unwilling, who could only worship Jehovah in secret glens and caves, as the persecuted since her day have done.

The most striking evidence of the fear in which her cruel fanaticism was held, is afforded by the flight of Elijah himself into the wilderness. After the mighty portents of Mount Carmel, so graphically described in the eighteenth chapter of the first book of Kings, the sanguine prophet, confident that even Jezebel must coincide as Ahab appeared to do, in the judgment of the people on that occasion, that even she must join in their acclamation—Jehovah, he is God! Jehovah, he is God!—runs in haste to Jezreel, and waits to be summoned to re-establish the worship of the God of Israel. But

instead of a summons, the infuriated woman, in contempt of the testimony of her husband who had been an eye-witness of the preceding marvels, sends him a message threatening death. Overpowered by disappointment and fear, the prophet gives way to desponding unbelief and flies into the wilderness.

Other incidents in the Scripture narrative, which afford a further insight into the depths of this evil character, now require notice. A woman who could thus brave the claims of Jehovah, was not likely to respect the rights of man. A single instance of the relentless energy with which she executed her purposes, is given in the case of a man whose property adjoined the palace grounds. With a respect for the rights of property which we are surprised to meet in a character like Ahab, the king proposes to secure it by barter or purchase. But Naboth declines, because it was against the laws of God for a man to alienate the possession of his fathers. In the struggle which took place between the king's cupidity on the one hand, and on the other hand his conscience, or more probably his fear of exciting a popular commotion in Naboth's favor, he shows the pettishness of a sick child. His wife, full of contempt for his scruples, but desirous to gratify her tool, directs the chief men of the city to arraign the poor Naboth for treason against God and the king. The stratagem she planned, succeeded, and he is murdered under color of law. She then coolly bids the coward go and take possession of the vineyard which he had coveted but dared not grasp by his own act. What is it to her, that she has shed innocent blood, has added rapine to murder, and hypocritically covered her contempt of justice under the forms of law? What is it to her that an orphaned family have been driven from their now desecrated home? We see her seated amidst her luxuries in the ivory house (1 Kings xxii. 39), her cruel heart

unmoved by the crimes she has thus committed against a defenceless man, to please her base partner in guilt.

The vices are said to run in companies. Remembering that the worship for which Jezebel had shown all the ardor of a devotee, was as lascivious as it was cruel, we shall not be doing her injustice if we interpret the language which is several times applied to her in the history, to mean that she was as great a disgrace to her sex in respect to modesty as in respect to gentleness and sensibility. The temples of Bel and the groves of Astarte were not the schools in which to train a tender and chaste woman. It is true that the terms which describe personal impurity, have often in Scripture a figurative application to idolatry: but when the basest epithets which can be applied to woman are found attached to the name of Jezebel (as by Jehu, for example, himself no spotless character, 2 Kings ix. 22), we infer that more than her idolatries are meant, and that this wicked woman was as licentious as she was cruel.

Jezebel was a mother. A mother! sacred name! The being who holds a plastic power for good or evil, how great! Were all the mothers of the world upon the side of God and truth, how mighty the revolution that would follow! But what could be expected of such a mother? The tigress will breed tigers. Ahaziah and Joram, her sons and successors to the throne, were the genuine offspring of their mother. Her daughter Athaliah, who married the king of Judah, also inherited her ambition and cruelty. This wicked woman, after the untimely death of her husband and oldest son whom she had corrupted by her influence, resolved to retain the reins of power, and for that purpose ruthlessly murdered all her grandsons, with the exception of one who was concealed by his aunt; and after enjoying her ill-gotten power for six years, she was herself

brought to a violent end. The curse of the Lord is on the house of the wicked.

We now approach the becoming termination of Jezebel's long career of iniquity. It appears that upon the occasion of Ahab's first visit to the grounds he had stolen from Naboth, it pleased Jehovah to warn him of the accursed end that awaited himself, his partner in crime, and his children. The great prophet who had so long haunted his steps, and whom he hated with all the violence of his cowardly nature, suddenly appeared before him to announce their doom. Upon the very spot where the dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, they should lick the blood of Ahab. Of his sons, him that died in the city the dogs should eat; him that died in the field the birds of prey should eat. And of Jezebel, the dogs should eat her body by the wall of Jezreel, the royal residence. Not to dwell upon the verification of these threatenings in the case of the king and his sons, we confine ourselves to the case of the queen. While Ahab was terrified at the denunciation of Elijah, Jezebel scorns to clothe herself in weeds, after his example. Why should she be moved by the curse of a prophet whom she had driven into the wilderness by the very terror of her name, and the worship of whose God she had almost extirpated? Bold from the beginning, she is bold to the end of her career of successes. But her time is come. The catastrophe occurred after the defeat of her second son Joram, who was slain by Jehu the agent chosen by Providence to execute his long-delayed vengeance. As soon as the battle was over, Jehu drove furiously with his hosts to take possession of the royal city. As he enters the gate in triumph, a bold sharp voice is heard above the noise of the multitude. It is the voice of Jezebel, not mourning for her son just slain, not imploring the forbearance of the conqueror. She has adorned her person after the fashion of the time, her eyes

painted, her head tired, as if she were still a sovereign. Her shrieking voice threatens Jehu with the fate of Zimri, who had been slain for usurping the throne of his master (1 Kings xvi. 9). In a pure and high-principled woman, we might feel justified in admiring as a noble courage, what we must here condemn as the desperation of a ferocious animal. It was no sense of injustice, no trust in God, no conscience void of offence, no patient resolution which have made so many delicate and timid females, heroines in the hour of danger. It is the madness of humbled pride, defeated ambition, and revenge frantic because powerless. Her last resort is to bravado. Hers is the bravery of the mastiff.

Jehu, who knew her well, "lifted up his face to the window" at which the infuriated woman stood, and shouted, "Who is on my side? who?" Two or three chamberlains looked forth, ready to propitiate the conqueror, who commanded them to cast her down. The result we give in the graphic words of the original narrative.

"And they threw her down, and part of her blood was sprinkled on the wall, and on the horses. And he trode her under foot. And when he was come in he did eat and drink. And he said, Go, see now this cursed woman, and bury her: for she is a king's daughter. And they went to bury her: but they found no more of her than the skull, and the feet, and the palms of the hands. Wherefore they came again and told him. And he said, This is the word of Jehovah, which he spake by his servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying; In the portion of Jezreel shall dogs eat the flesh of Jezebel: and the carcass of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the field in the portion of Jezreel, so that none shall say, This is Jezebel."

Our memoir might be made to point many a moral. It illustrates the fatal consequences of mating with unbelievers in the true God; the vast influence of high station abused; the unscrupulous

nature of ambition; the intolerance of idolatry; and the indignant curse which sooner or later falls upon the house of the wicked. But we must pass by these and other lessons, and confine ourselves to the testimony it affords to *the mighty transforming power which belongs to sin*. By that power we have seen woman converted into a fiend.

In compliment to woman, it has been said—and we have no disposition to question its justice—that “Intellect is of no sex.” May it not be said with even less room for debate, that Sin is of no sex? It is not our purpose to compare the sexes as to their constitutional differences, or attempt to decide which has contributed most largely to the benignant, and which to the malign influences, that are active in the movements of society. Least of all would we detract from the glory which really belongs to woman when, under the control of pure moral sentiments, she devotes herself to the work for which her constitutional instincts qualify her.

He is a parricide of his mother's name
 Who wrongs the praise of woman; who dares write
 Libels on saints, or with foul ink requite
 The milk they lent us.

We leave it to that class of “men of the world” who have no virtue themselves, to disparage the whole race of women. A host of mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters refute their slanders, by realizing the beautiful ideal of holy Scripture, in which the virtuous and calm affections enshrining themselves in her peculiar nature, predominate over those evil tendencies, in which woman, alas, is no less a sharer than man.

But, she too is a fallen being. She too has been poisoned by the common taint, and none of her instincts are so pure and strong as to have escaped beyond its reach. It is a wicked flattery that denies this fact. There is a dark as well as a bright side to the history of the sex. In acting their parts in public or private life, have they not—(we will not say as often, but)—as thoroughly displayed the power of pride, ambition, envy, vanity, jealousy, revenge, with their attendant meannesses, treacheries, and violence? Have they not furnished their quota to the crowd of voluptuaries who worship at the shrine of Belial—of the greedy who bow to Mammon, of the cruel who have surrounded the altars of Moloch? There have been many Jezebels. The dark spots of history have received their hue almost as much from the crimes of the female great ones of the earth, as from those of the other sex who have often been merely their agents. And even in the less conspicuous theatres of human life—even under the appliances of Christianity, who has not met with examples of all the passions in excessive forms, showing that the female soul may be converted into a noxious swamp, exhaling baneful vapors?

Indeed, energy of intellect and will, destitute of the control of principle, when found in the form of a beautiful woman, make her a being more to be dreaded than a wicked man, because by her sexual blandishments she subjugates his will through his passions, and is thus enabled to subsidize and direct his more rugged violence. Our Christian poet expresses the universal opinion, when he says, "A wicked woman is the worst of men." No man can go farther towards the extremes of impurity and even cruelty, than she who has shaken off the natural restraints of her sex. In ancient days women took a delighted part in witnessing the bloody combats of the gladiators; and in modern times, those of the bull-fight, and by

their presence and applause contributed mainly to stimulate those brutal exhibitions. Amid the scenes of revolution, women have often played the most fierce and bloody part. "If the women do not mix in it,"—whispered Mirabeau to the emissaries whom he was exciting to the first Parisian insurrection—"there will be nothing done." The women of Paris, running at the head of the republican bands of the capital, were, in effect, the first to violate the palace, brandish their poniards over the bed of the queen; and during her last melancholy journey to the scaffold, her own sex crowded round her to enjoy her misery, and heap upon her their obscene and brutal taunts. They carried on the end of their pikes the heads of the massacred bodyguards. Of all the agents of cruelty during that era of crime, whose convulsions like an earthquake revealed many hidden things, none excite our horror so much as the "Knitters of Robespierre," so called because, with the symbols of quiet domestic life in their hands, "they stood in crowds around the tribunals, followed the tumbrils, and sat on the very steps of the guillotine, to greet death, insult its victims, and glut their eyes with blood." Were these things possible only in that age? As if to prove that poisoned waters may still flow from the fountain, we learn that women have partaken in the ferocious excesses which have disgraced the same city during our own times. Yes, if it were just to give to the Graces and Muses, no less just was it to give to the Furies, a female form.

Not to dwell longer upon such repulsive pictures, we return to the thought already expressed, that in no case does sin display its power so balefully as in causing the transformation of which these and kindred crimes are the fruits. It is indeed the crowning triumph of sin. And that it should be so regarded universally by the wicked as well as the good among men, is a testimony to the high estimate universally attached to female excellence. Every man, be he of the

vilest sort, agrees to the sentiment of our great poet, that "proper deformity shows not in fiend so horrid as in woman." Every, even the most unprincipled man, desires a modest and gentle woman for a mother, a wife, a daughter, or sister. Who, with a full knowledge of their characters, would, from love, mate with a Semiramis, a Herodias, a Catharine of Russia, a Brinvilliers? The brutal Claudius, himself a "mere composition of mud mixed with blood," could not endure the infamous Messalina for a wife: and Nero justified his parricide, because Agrippina his mother had become the scandal of her sex for her amours and murders. Before, therefore, she can attract the love and confidence of man, she must appear to him, as woman, full of the modesty, reserve, and tenderness, which seem to be hers by a sort of physical necessity. She must feign, if she do not feel, these qualities. "False face must hide what the false heart doth know." Cleopatra could not have subjugated the conqueror of the East, with all her wit and beauty, if she had from the first appeared before him in her real character for cruelty and licentiousness. When Catharine de Medicis first appeared at the French court, she came as a gentle, amiable, domestic woman; nor was it until ambition had taken possession of her heart, that she became the Jezebel of modern times; like her, remorseless in cruelty; like her in antipathy to the worship of the true God, in the skill with which she subjugated the will of her husband and sons, and in the unflinching decision with which she pursued her objects. And (to turn again to our story for an illustration) Ahab, wicked as he was, was first the lover of a gentle, fascinating woman, before he became the pander and minion of a fury. The claws of the tigress were doubtless concealed under a soft, attractive covering, until her womanly skill had established her power.

Our justification for having presented these revolting aspects of

the female character, must be their truthfulness, and the momentous lesson which they convey, viz., that society must not rely upon the merely constitutional qualities of the sex which was first in the transgression, as sufficient preservatives against the power of a principle which has produced such results. She too has susceptibilities for that fatal influence, which, when it has conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death in her no less than man. For her, as for man, the only security is to be sought in the regenerating influences of the Spirit and the Word of Truth. The noblest specimens of womanhood are those who have received the second birth of Grace, and have learned the necessary lessons of Virtue at the feet of Mary's friend. Then, indeed, they are

The common clay, ta'en from the common earth,
But wrought of God, and tempered by the tears
Of angels, to the perfect form of — *woman*.

Otherwise, the fire of temptation may blacken if it does not destroy them. Why, then, should not youthful woman be taught to hearken to the ten thousand voices which convey the memorable moral, "Let her that thinketh that she standeth, take heed lest she fall?"