

THE BOOK OF NUMBERS.

CHAPTER I.

Numbers i.

And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, saying,

2 Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of *their* names, every male by their polls :

32 ¶ These *are* those which were numbered of the children of Israel by the house of their fathers : all those that were numbered of the camps throughout their hosts *were* six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty.

IN this chapter Moses is commanded to number the people and the princes of the tribe, males only, and by the houses of their fathers. As the object was to see how many effective men there were able to go to war, the priests, the women, the feeble old men and children were not counted. Women have frequently been classified with priests in some privileges and disabilities. At one time in the United States the clergy were not allowed to vote nor hold office. Like women, they were considered too good to mingle in political circles. For them to have individual opinions on the vital questions of the hour might introduce dissensions alike into the church and the home.

This census of able bodied men still runs on through chapter ii, and all these potential soldiers are called children of their fathers. Although at this period woman's chief duty and happiness was bearing children, no mention is made of the mothers of this mighty host, though some woman had gone to the gates of death to give each soldier life ; provided him with rations long before he could forage for himself, and first taught his little feet to march to tune and time. But, perhaps, if we could refer to the old Jewish census tables we might

find that the able bodied males of these tribes, favorites of Heaven, had all sprung, Minerva-like, from the brains of their fathers, and that only the priests, the feeble old men and the children had mothers to care for them, in the absence of the princes and soldiers.

However, in some valuable calculations of Schenker we learn that there was some thought of the mothers of the tribes by German commentators. We find in his census such references as the following: The children of Jacob by Leah. The children of Jacob by Zilpah. The children of Jacob by Rachel. The children of Jacob by Bilhah. But even this generous mention of the mothers of the tribe of Jacob does not satisfy the exacting members of the Revising Committee. We feel that the facts should have been stated thus: The children of Leah, Zilpah, Rachel and Bilhah by Jacob, making Jacob the incident instead of the four women. Men may consider this a small matter on which to make a point, but in restoring woman's equality everywhere we must insist on her recognition in all these minor particulars, and especially in the Bible, to which people go for their authority on the civil and social status of all womankind.

E. C. S.

CHAPTER II.

Numbers v.

1 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,
2 Command the children of Israel, that they put out of the camp every leper, and every one that hath an issue, and whosoever is defiled by the dead :

3 Both male and female that they defile not their camps.

11 ¶ And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

12 If any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him.

14 And the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and she be defiled ; or if she be not defiled :

15 Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth part of an ephah of barley meal ; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon ; for it is an offering of jealousy.

17 And the priest shall take holy water in an earthen vessel ; and of the dust that is in the floor of the tabernacle the priest shall take, and put it into the water :

18 And the priest shall set the woman before the Lord and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering, and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse :

19 And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, if thou hast not gone aside be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse :

20 But if thou hast gone aside, and if thou be defiled,

21 Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The Lord make thee a curse and an oath among thy people.

24 And he shall cause the woman to drink the bitter water that causeth the curse :

25 Then the priest shall take the jealousy offering out of the woman's hand, and shall wave the offering before the Lord, and offer it upon the altar :

26 And the priest shall take a handful of the offering, even the memorial thereof, and burn it upon the altar, and afterwards shall cause the woman to drink the water.

27 And when he hath made her to drink the water, then it shall come to pass, that if she be defiled, and have done trespass against her husband, that the water that causeth the curse shall enter into her, and become bitter.

28 And if the woman be not defiled, but be clean : then she shall be free.

AT the first blush it seems very cruel for the Jewish God to order the diseased and unfortunate to be thrown out of the camp and left in the wilderness. But commentators suggest that they must have had a sanatorium near by where the helpless could be protected. Though improbable, still the suggestion will be a relief to sensitive souls. This ordinance of Moses probably suggested the first idea of a hospital. The above account of the unfortunate wife was called "trial by ordeal," of which Clarke gives a minute description in his commentaries. It was common at one time among many nations, the women in all cases being the chief sufferers as in the modern trials for witchcraft. If the witch was guilty when thrown into the water she went to the bottom, if innocent she floated on the surface

and was left to sink, so in either case her fate was the same. As men make and execute the laws, prescribe and administer the punishment, "trials by a jury or ordeal" for women though seemingly fair, are never based on principles of equity. The one remarkable fact in all these social transgressions in the early periods as well as in our modern civilization is that the penalties whether moral or material all fall on woman. Verily the darkest page in human history is the slavery of women!

The offering by the priest to secure her freedom was of the cheapest character. Oil and frankincense signifying grace and acceptableness were not permitted to be used in her case. The woman's head is uncovered as a token of her shame, the dust from the floor signifies contempt and condemnation, compelling the woman to drink water mixed with dirt and gall is in the same malicious spirit. There is no instance recorded of one of these "trials by ordeal" ever actually taking place, as divorce was so easy that a man could put away his wife at pleasure, so he need not go to the expense of even "a tenth part of an ephah of barley," on a wife of doubtful faithfulness. Moreover the woman upon whom it was proposed to try all these pranks might be innocent, and the jealous husband make himself ridiculous in the eyes of the people. But the publication of these ordinances no doubt had a restraining influence on the young and heedless daughters of Israel, and they serve as landmarks in man's system of jurisprudence, to show us how far back he has been consistent in his unjust legislation for woman.

E. C. S.

CHAPTER III.

Numbers xii.

And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married.

2 And they said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.

3 (Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.)

5 And the Lord came down in the pillar of the cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle and called Aaron and Miriam, and they both came forth.

6 And He said, Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I, the Lord, will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.

8 With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches;

and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?

9 And the anger of the Lord was kindled against them: and He departed.

10 And the cloud departed from off the tabernacle; and, behold, Miriam became leprous, white as snow; and Aaron looked upon Miriam, and behold, she was leprous.

11 And Aaron said unto Moses, Alas, my lord, I beseech thee, lay not the sin upon us, wherein we have done foolishly, and wherein we have sinned.

13 And Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, Heal her now, O God, I beseech thee.

15 And Miriam was shut out from the camp seven days: and the people journeyed not till Miriam was brought in again.

HERE we have the first mention of Moses's second marriage, but the name of the woman is not given, though she is the assigned cause of the sedition. Both Aaron and Miriam had received a portion of the prophetic genius that distinguished Moses, and they naturally thought that they should have some share in the government, at least to make a few suggestions, when they thought Moses made a blunder. Miriam was older than Moses, and had at this time the experience of 120 years. When Moses was an infant on the River Nile, Miriam was intrusted by his parents to watch the fate of the infant in the bulrushes and the daughter of Pharaoh in her daily walks by the river side. It was her diplomacy that secured the child's own mother for his nurse in the household of the King of Egypt.

It is rather remarkable, if Moses was as meek as he is represented in the third verse, that he should have penned that strong assertion of his own innate modesty. There are evidences at this and several other points that Moses was not the sole editor

of the Pentateuch, if it can be shown that he wrote any part of it.

Speaking of the punishment of Miriam, Clarke in his commentaries says it is probable that Miriam was chief in this mutiny; hence she was punished while Aaron was spared. A mere excuse for man's injustice; had he been a woman he would have shared the same fate. The real reason was that Aaron was a priest. Had he been smitten with leprosy, his sacred office would have suffered and the priesthood fallen into disrepute.

As women are supposed to have no character or sacred office, it is always safe to punish them to the full extent of the law. So Miriam was not only afflicted with leprosy, but also shut out of the camp for seven days. One would think that potential motherhood should make women as a class as sacred as the priesthood. In common parlance we have much fine-spun theorizing on the exalted office of the mother, her immense influence in moulding the character of her sons; "the hand that rocks the cradle moves the world," etc., but in creeds and codes, in constitutions and Scriptures, in prose and verse, we do not see these lofty pæans recorded or verified in living facts. As a class, women were treated among the Jews as an inferior order of beings, just as they are to-day in all civilized nations. And now, as then, men claim to be guided by the will of God.

In this narrative we see thus early woman's desire to take some part in government, though denied all share in its honor and dignity. Miriam, no doubt, saw the humiliating distinctions of sex in the Mosaic code and customs, and longed for the power to make the needed amendments. In criticising the discrepancies in Moses's character and government, Miriam showed a keen insight into the common principles of equity and individual conduct, and great self-respect and self-assertion in expressing her opinions—qualities most lacking in ordinary women.

Evidently the same blood that made Moses and Aaron what they were, as leaders of men, flowed also in the veins of Miriam. As daughters are said to be more like their fathers and sons like their mothers, Moses probably inherited his meekness and

distrust of himself from his mother, and Miriam her self-reliance and heroism from her father. Knowing these laws of heredity, Moses should have averted the punishment of Miriam instead of allowing the full force of God's wrath to fall upon her alone. If Miriam had helped to plan the journey to Canaan, it would no doubt have been accomplished in forty days instead of forty years. With her counsel in the cabinet, the people might have enjoyed peace and prosperity, cultivating the arts and sciences, instead of making war on other tribes, and burning offerings to their gods. Miriam was called a prophetess, as the Lord had, on some occasions, it is said, spoken through her, giving messages to the women. After their triumphal escape from Egypt, Miriam led the women in their songs of victory. With timbrels and dances, they chanted that grand chorus that has been echoed and re-echoed for centuries in all our cathedrals round the globe. Catholic writers represent Miriam "as a type of the Virgin Mary, being legislatrix over the Israelitish women, especially endowed with the spirit of prophecy."

Numbers xx.

Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the

first month : and the people abode in Kadesh ; and Miriam died there, and was buried there.

Eusebius says her tomb was to be seen at Kadesh, near the city of Petra, in his time, and that she and her brothers all died in the same year, it is hoped to reappear as equals in the resurrection.

E. C. S.

CHAPTER IV.

Numbers vi.

1 And the Lord said unto Moses,
 2 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say,
 When either man or woman shall separate
themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, unto the
 Lord.

5 All the days of the vow of his separation
 there shall no razor come upon his head ; until
 the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth
himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy, *and*
 shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow.

THE Nazarites, both men and women, allowed their hair to grow long, as the hair of the Nazarine was a token of subjection, the man to God, the woman to man. St. Paul no doubt alluded to this custom when he said the woman ought to have power upon her head, that is, wear her hair and veil and bonnet in church as a proof of her subjection to man, as he is to the Lord. The discipline of the church to-day requires a woman to cover her head before entering a cathedral for worship.

The fashion for men to sit with their heads bare in our churches, while women must wear bonnets, is based on this ancient custom of the Nazarine. But as fashion is gradually reducing the bonnet to an infinitesimal fraction it will probably in the near future be dispensed with altogether. A lady in England made the experiment of going to the established church without her bonnet, but it created such an agitation in the congregation that the Bishop wrote her a letter on the impropriety and requested her to come with her head covered. She refused. He then called and labored with her as to the sinfulness of the proceedings, and at parting commanded her either to cover her head or stay away from church altogether. She choose the latter. I saw and heard that letter read at a luncheon in London, where several ladies were present. It was received with peals of laughter. The lady is the wife of a colonel in the British army.

Numbers xxv.

6 ¶ And, behold, one of the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses and all the congregation of the children of Israel.

7 And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose and took a javelin in his hand ;

8 And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through, the man of Israel, and the woman.

14 Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, *even* that was slain with the Midianitish woman, *was* Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of a chief house among the Simeonites.

15 And the name of the Midianitish woman that was slain *was* Cozbi, the daughter of Zur ; he *was* head over a people, *and* of a chief house in Midian.

Some commentators say the tie between Zimri and Cozbi was a matrimonial alliance, understood in good faith by the Midianitish woman. He was a prince and she was a princess. But the Jewish law forbade a man going outside of his tribe for a wife. It was deemed idolatry. But why kill the woman. She had not violated the laws of her tribe and was no doubt ignorant of Jewish law. Other commentators say that Zimri was notorious at the licentious feasts of Baal-poer and that the Midianitish women tempted the sons of Israel to idolatry. Hence the justice of killing both Zimri and Cozbi in one blow. It is remarkable that the influence of woman is so readily and universally recognized in leading the strongest men into sin, but so uniformly ignored as a stimulus to purity and perfection. Unless the good predominates over the evil in the mothers of the race, there is no hope of our ultimate perfection.

E. C. S.

The origin of the command that women should cover their heads is found in an old Jewish or Hebrew legend which appears in literature for the first time in Genesis vi. There we are told the Sons of God, that is, the angels, took to wives the daughters of men, and begat the giants and heroes, who were instrumental in bringing about the flood. The Rabbins held that the way in which the angels got possession of women was by laying hold of their hair ; they accordingly warned women to cover their heads in public, so that the angels might not get possession of them. It was believed that the strength of people lay in their

hair, as the story of Samson illustrates. Paul merely repeats this warning which he must often have heard at the feet of Gamaliel, who was at that time Prince or President of the Sanhedrim, telling women to have a "power (that is, protection) on their heads because of the angels:" I Corinthians, chapter xi, verse 10. "For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels." Thus the command has its origin in an absurd old myth. This legend will be found fully treated in a German pamphlet—*Die paulinische Angelologie und Daemonologie*. Otto Everling, Gottingen, 1888.

If the command to keep silence in the churches has no higher origin than that to keep covered in public, should so much weight be given it, or should it be so often quoted as having Divine sanction?

The injunctions of St. Paul have had such a decided influence in fixing the legal status of women that it is worth our while to consider their source. In dealing with this question we must never forget that the majority of the writings of the New Testament were not really written or published by those whose names they bear. Ancient writers considered it quite permissible for a man to put out letters under the name of another, and thus to bring his own ideas before the world under the protection of an honored sponsor. It is not usually claimed that St. Paul was the originator of the great religious movement called Christianity, but there is a strong belief that he was divinely inspired. His inward persuasions, and especially his visions appeared as a gift or endowment which had the force of inspiration; therefore, his mandates concerning women have a strong hold upon the popular mind, and when opponents to the equality of the sexes are put to bay they glibly quote his injunctions.

We congratulate ourselves that we may shift some of these biblical arguments that have such a sinister effect from their firm foundation. He who claims to give a message must satisfy us that he has himself received such message.

L. S.

CHAPTER V.

Numbers xxvii.

1 Then came the daughters of Zelophehad, the son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, of the families of Manasseh, the son of Joseph; and these are the names of his daughters: Mahiah, Noah, and Hogiah, and Milcah, and Tirzah.

2 And they stood before Moses, and before Eleazar the priest, and before the princes and all the congregation, by the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying,

3 Our father died in the wilderness, and he was not in the company of them that gathered themselves together against the Lord in the company of Korah.

4 Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.

5 And Moses brought their cause before the Lord.

6 ¶ And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying,

7 The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them.

8 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a man die, and have no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughter.

9 And if he have no daughter, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his brethren.

10 And if he have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his father's brethren.

11 And if his father have no brethren, then ye shall give his inheritance unto his kinsman that is next to him of his family, and he shall possess it; and it shall be unto the children of Israel a statute of judgment, as the Lord commanded Moses.

THE respect paid to the daughters of Zelophehad at that early day is worthy the imitation of the rulers in our own times. These daughters were no doubt fine-looking, well-developed women, gifted with the power of eloquence, able to impress their personality and arguments on that immense assemblage of the people. They were allowed to plead their own case in person before the lawgivers, the priests, and the princes, the rulers in State and Church, and all the congregation, at the very door of the tabernacle. They presented their case with such force and clearness that all saw the justice of their claims. Moses was so deeply impressed that he at once retired to his closet to listen to the still small voice of conscience and commune with his Maker. In response, the Lord said to him: "The daughters of Zelophehad speak right, if a man die and leave no son, then ye shall cause his inheritance to pass unto his daughters." It would have been commendable if

