

FOLLOWING STRANGE GODS

One of the Twelve Stories of Solomon.

BY THE "HIGHWAY AND BYWAY" PREACHER

Scripture Authority—1 Kings 11: 4-13.

SERMONETTE.

Solomon followed strange gods because it seemed the only way of securing domestic peace and happiness. He broke with God in order that he might win the smiles and favor of the beautiful women of his harem.

It is not hard to find men falling before the same temptation today. Naturally men are pleasers of themselves and their friends, rather than God.

Following after the Lord, as did David his father, would have been a more difficult road for Solomon to have traveled, just as the road of righteousness today appears for the present time to be rough and unpleasant.

Every earthly joy and every earthly friendship which is won by the sacrifice of loyalty and devotion to God is a form of idolatry which is destructive of true piety and goodness.

The broad-mindedness of Solomon which made a place for the gods of the wives he had taken to himself from the nations about is akin to the broad-mindedness of many in the world today who seek to fraternize the followers of Christian and non-Christian religions.

But the broad-mindedness that takes in everything but God and his truth, is not broad-mindedness at all, but the rankest kind of narrow-mindedness, for it is letting the things of time shut out the things of eternity; it is permitting the imaginings of the human heart to take the place of the everlasting verities of God.

Doubtless Solomon flattered himself upon the clever manner in which he was reconciling all of the varied interests of his household and his kingdom, but when we read the sequel to the story of his misstep and behold the disintegration of the kingdom and the scattering of God's people we can only exclaim, what folly and wickedness.

The fathers-in-law and the brothers-in-law of Solomon—and he must have had a host of them, for 700 of the fairest of the princesses of the heathen nations about were numbered among his wives—doubtless thought Solomon a jolly good fellow, and felt pretty much at home in the liberal atmosphere Solomon had created in Israel. I can hear some of them congratulating him because he was not narrow and bigoted like his father David, and was willing to see good in the gods of other nations.

Solomon thus made friends with the world, but he lost the friendship of God.

Which would you rather have? "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." And Jesus said: "Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you!"

THE STORY.

HAD the prophet Nathan been alive perchance King Solomon would not have transgressed the law of God so grievously and gone after the gods whom the fair wives of his harem

worshiped. Nathan had always held a strong influence over his royal master, and up to the time of his death had maintained the spiritual conditions of the kingdom at a comparatively high level, but when Nathan was gone, other influences were soon at work to turn the heart of the king in other directions than that of the worship and service of the true God.

Chief among these influences was that of the many beautiful women whom King Solomon had taken to wife among the nations about. More and more was it apparent that in the absence of the strong influence of Nathan the power of the women over the king was becoming stronger and stronger. In fact, in the course of time as King Solomon got along in years it became a recognized fact that the quickest way to secure a favor from him was to obtain it through the intermediation of one of his favorite wives.

It is not strange, therefore, that one of the marked changes which should have taken place had to do with the religious condition of the people, for not one of the heathen princesses who had been taken to wife by Solomon but had brought with her her gods, and with the ascendancy of their influence over Solomon came the request that high places be built for these gods where public worship might be held. And when the favorite women had all been thus provided for, there came the clamor from the other women that their gods be honored in a similar way, and that high places be built in which they might worship.

Ahijah the prophet of God had long been watching the trend of events, and his mind was deeply troubled. Time and again he had sought audience with the king and had spoken against the growing idolatry, but the king had put the matter away as of light concern, saying that it was but natural that these princesses should wish to serve the gods whom they had known and served in their own lands.

"But," Ahijah had urged, "these idolatrous practices will not long be confined to these foreign princesses, the wives of my lord the king, for the people, beholding, will be drawn into similar practices."

But the king only laughed at the prophet's fears, declaring that he and his people knew that there was but one God and he the God of the people of Israel, and that the worship of strange gods by the princesses would not make any difference with the people of Israel.

Thus time had gone on, and one by one the high places had increased, until now all the strange gods had been honored. There were high places and beautiful groves to Ashtoreth, to Milcom, to Chemosh, to the terrible Moloch, and to all the other gods, so that Jerusalem and the surrounding country was dotted with these places.

Ahijah watched all this with increasing concern and heart-ache. What more could he say than he had said? What more could he do to check the idolatrous tendency of the people?

Filled with these thoughts he felt impelled one day to go forth and visit those high places. The one in particular toward which he directed his footsteps was that erected to the god Chemosh, the abomination of the people of Moab. It had been built on the hill opposite to Jerusalem and in plain view of the temple which years before Solomon had taken such delight in building to his God.

"Oh, can it be possible!" he exclaimed, "that Solomon has thus dared to defy and dishonor his God? Has he no regard for the God who made him what he is and hath given him all the great prosperity which hath marked his reign? No, it cannot be that Solomon knows of this latest iniquity. It must be that some one of the women more presuming than the others has caused this work to be wrought without the knowledge of the king. I will see him at once." And turning around hastily Ahijah re-

traced his steps to the city, and went direct to the palace. As he drew near to the great gateway it swung open and the king himself appeared surrounded by a brilliant company of people, in the midst of whom he noted some of the royal women. They turned as they came out of the gate and took the road leading towards the temple.

"Were it not for the presence of the women I should think that Solomon were going to worship," Ahijah muttered to himself as he drew into the shadow of the high wall. "I will follow and see whither the company is journeying. Perchance I will find an opportunity to speak with the king."

And so Ahijah followed, but as the procession drew near to the temple it took the road which turned to the left and went towards the gate that led down into the valley and towards the hill opposite.

"Not going to the temple, that is certain," muttered Ahijah, as he turned and followed.

Out through the gate of the city proceeded the procession, and on down into the valley. When it started to ascend the hill on the opposite side and draw near the place of festivity where the ceremonies were to be held in honor of the god of Chemosh, Ahijah, no longer in doubt now as to the intended destiny of the king, hastened by a side-path to the center of the beautiful grove, and ascending the high place on which the offerings were made to the heathen god he drew his mantle about him, shrouding his face in its depths, and waited.

First came the dancing maidens, the little silver bells with which they were adorned mingling their music with the voices which filled the soft afternoon air. So enrapt were they with their dance and song, and so fascinated was the royal company with the gay sight, that none at first noticed the silent, dark form standing before the great image.

Then one of the fair maidens, lifting her eyes, saw the prophet and gave a cry of astonishment and fear, in which all the others joined as their attention was drawn to the motionless figure standing there. For one brief moment they stood and then fled like frightened birds fleeing before the hawk.

During the silence which followed, King Solomon, by some invisible power which he seemed unable to resist, drew near while the rest of the company fell back. Then the voice of the prophet broke the stillness, with measured word, clear and stern:

"Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as this is done of thee, oh, King Solomon, and thou hast not kept thy covenant and my statutes, which I have commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give it to thy servant. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it, for David thy father's sake; but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son."

Immovable as stone Solomon stood, hearing, seeing, knowing nothing save that God by his servant, the prophet Ahijah, had spoken an awful word of judgment upon him and his house. And while he thus stood the prophet passed down the hill and disappeared in the distance.

"He is gone?" at last questioningly spoke the king, looking up to the place where the prophet had stood. "But his words shall abide," he muttered with awesome voice as he, too, turned and retraced his steps to the palace.

Once a Corporal, Now a Minister.

M. Praschek, who now enters the Austrian cabinet as minister in the place of Count Auersperg, is a farmer in a small way who derives a portion of his income from the retail sale of the milk of his cows, having a farm of about 60 acres.

He put in three years in the army,—not as an officer, but as a bugler, and figured as such in the reserve forces of the army with the rank of corporal.



A GUY FAWKES' ADVENTURE.

How the Boys Got the Best of a Big Bully.

"Don't you know, Tommy, I think it's a shame, just because a fellow was brave enough to blow up a whole house of parliament way back in November, 1605, that he should have to be burned in effigy every November since that time!"

Billy Berkely grinned as he replied: "You're more an admirer of Guy Fawkes than old Gruffy is, then. You remember Gruffy called him a cowardly sneak. Anyway, he was careful enough to place a long fuse that led to the barrels of gunpowder stored in



They Toiled in Secrecy.

the cellar beneath the house; so you can't say that he was in any particular danger."

"I don't care; Gruffy's said, too, that you should act from principle—and you can't tell me that Guy Fawkes didn't act from his principle." Tommy Fowler kicked his heels defiantly against his desk, awaiting further comment from his chum.

Billy, however, refused to enter into an argument. "That's neither here nor there," said he; "we've got to have some fun to-morrow, and since it's November 5, we might as well burn a Guy Fawkes as anything. You can pretend it's an effigy of some person other than Guy Fawkes, if you want to, but you've got to help us rig out a dummy of some sort."

"Only wish we could burn Jack Croton. He's the cheekiest chap and the biggest bully we've got in Chesterville academy, and he's getting worse every day," Tommy muttered.

Billy remained in deep thought for several minutes. Then he responded: "You're right, Tommy. And we've just got to take him down six or seven pegs. The way he fags those little chaps is shameful. What do you say to thinking up some sort of scheme to make him whistle to-morrow?"

Nothing was more agreeable to Tommy. Indeed, he was in his element when plotting mischief with Billy Berkely—and there hardly ever passed a day during which the results of these warlike conferences did not show themselves.

Jimmy Durkin was taken into the confidence of the two conspirators. All that afternoon they toiled in secrecy, making a dummy that, when completed, was the exact counterpart of Gruffy Jenkins, the Latin master—more often known as "Old Gruffy."

The next evening, in a secluded corner of the playground, they built a good-sized bonfire. Then they bound the arms of the dummy together in the back, drew an old slouch hat down over the "face" and put the effigy in the midst of the material for the fire.

SHADOW-TAG.

A Game Which Can Be Played Early in the Morning or Late Afternoon.

Shadow-tag is a good name for the early morning or late afternoon, when the shadows are long and clear. It may be played in any clear space where there are one or two trees, or a house, to afford shadows. For the shadows are the "goal," where the players are safe, and the child who is "it," instead of tagging the others, tries to step on their shadows as they run from one shade to another. It is great fun, for unless you are careful your shadow is apt to bob up unexpectedly and will be stepped on before you know it. We played "shadow-tag" successfully on a roof garden, where two sheds gave us the necessary shade and an open space of sun in between made the shadow of the runners quite distinct.

In cold weather, when you need to exercise, and don't know exactly what to play, it is a good idea to run races and let one of the children find prizes

When this was done Tommy and Billy hid themselves behind neighboring trees, while Jimmy went in search of Jack Croton.

Jimmy approached Jack Croton when he found him, and whispered in his ear: "I say, Jack, those chaps, Tommy Fowler and Billy Berkely, have a Guy Fawkes all to themselves down in a corner of the playground. They've just gone away for a few minutes for something, and left it. It'd be great fun to go and fire it off, and burn the whole thing before they get back."

The next instant found the bonfire in flames. Jack was standing by, laughing at his work, when Billy and Tommy rushed up, demanding fiercely:

"What have you done? Help us! Have you burned Gruffy?"

"Burned Gruffy?" stammered Jack. "Of course, didn't you understand? Billy and I have had a long grudge against him, so we tripped him up, and before he knew what was being done had him gagged and bound. Then, to frighten him, we sat him up amidst the bonfire to make him believe we were going to burn him! Jack Croton, you're a murderer!" Tommy and Billy shrank back aghast.

"Moses!" huskily gasped the bully; "seems to me that coat and hat did look familiar. But you know I didn't mean it! You know I didn't mean it, boys!"

Jimmy's voice shook, though not with terror, as he said: "Yes, but you've got to tell that to the doctor." "Tell the doctor? Oh, I can't!" and the big fellow whimpered like one of the little chaps he had often treated so cruelly.

Then the three led the shrinking fellow up the steps of the doctor's house, and watched him disappear within the door.

Jack Croton left the school a few days later! He couldn't stand the chaff that went round about the burning of Gruffy. An the last message he left was:

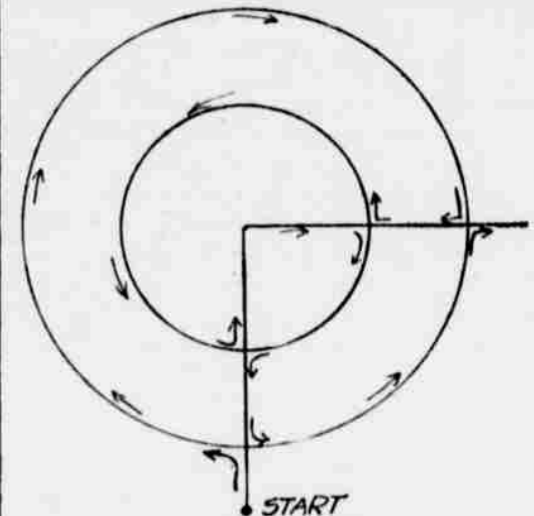
"Tell Tom Fowler and Bill Berkely that I'll be revenged on them if it takes a lifetime."

But the two had heard threats from bullies before, and had no other feeling but joy that the enemy of nearly every one in the academy had at last departed.—Los Angeles Times.

CAN YOU DO IT?

Trace the Diagram Without Removing Pencil or Crossing Line.

We indicate by the arrows how a seemingly impossible drawing feat



can be done. Make a drawing similar to the one shown only leaving out the arrows and ask your friends if they can draw the design without removing the pencil from the paper or crossing a line. It will prove a puzzler to them.

Catching the Wayfarer.

Cogger—The good parson told me I should always be trying to lift up my fellow man.

Motorwood—What did you answer? Cogger—I told him I would put a scoop on my automobile at the earliest opportunity.—Chicago Daily News.

Will Be Kept Busy.

"If a man wif a million," said Uncle Eben, "listens to all de advice he gits 'bout what to do wif it, he ain' got no time to answer questions 'bout how he got it."—Washington Star.

HOW TO STOP A NOSE-BLEED.

Good Idea, However, Not to Select One Who Bears You a Grudge.

When the bellboy responded to the signal he found the elderly traveling man standing in the center of the room holding a handkerchief to his nose, from which the blood was oozing.

"Give me a slap alongside of the head, good and hard," said the elderly man, turning his face toward the boy and speaking with difficulty.

"But, sir, I—don't know what you mean, sir," stammered the boy, backing toward the door.

"Don't stop to talk," sputtered the traveling man. "Slap me, I tell you," again holding his head forward. The boy hesitated for a moment, then timidly slapped the man's face. "Harder!" commanded the smitten one. The boy hesitated no longer, but with his open palm dealt the man a vigorous blow.

"That's better," grunted the gory one as he removed the handkerchief and after a test found the bleeding

had stopped. "I'm subject to these attacks of nose bleed," he explained to the astonished youth, handing him a tip. "I have tried all sorts of remedies, but nothing acts more promptly than a blow alongside the head. The shock seems to paralyze the ruptured blood vessels and they quit work at once. I got the idea from an old physician in Mexico."

Education.

An old darkey in Alabama called across the fence to his neighbor's son, who goes to school at the Atlanta university: "Look hyar, boy, you goes to school, don't yer?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy.

"Gettin' eddycashion, ain't yer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Larnin' rithmetic and figgerin' on a slate, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, it don't take two whole days to make an hour, do it?"

"Why, no," exclaimed the boy.

"You was goin' to bring that hatchet back in an hour, wasn't yer? And it's been two whole days since you borrowed it? Now, what's the use

of your eddycashion if you go to school a whole year an' den can't tell how long it takes to fetch back dat hatchet?"

Loyal to Her Lord.

The late Dr. William M. Paxton used to say that the most pathetic gift for missions, and relatively the largest ever given in his New York church, was a five-dollar gold-piece brought him by a poor widow, who, in order to enable herself to give it, raised chickens on the roof of the tenement, the attic of which was her abode. She had absolutely no other way of raising money, and it took her a whole summer of constant care to gather this sum. The Lord saw that this poor widow cast in more than all the rich givers in that old historic First church.

Woman's Inhumanity.

"When you read about the way they are killing those beautiful birds down in Florida," said Mrs. Lapsling, "you wonder how any woman can be so heartless as to wear a vinaigrette on her hat!"

for the racers. The prizes may be anything she finds at hand—the more ridiculous the better—but it makes the race more interesting to have them, particularly if they are presented with a speech. It is well to let all the players have prizes, though of course the winner receives the first prize.

Hilarious.

Eva—I understand that when Kathleen eloped from the house at 3 a. m. her father made strenuous efforts to raise the window of his room. Edna—Wanted to intercept her, I suppose?

Eva—No, wanted to shout "Hurrah, ma, she's gone at last!"—Chicago Daily News.

Most Important.

When Dorothy was traveling with her mother in England she was shown a number of relics.

"This," proudly explained their guide, "is a cannon captured from the Americans at the battle of Bunker Hill, in 1775."

"Yes, but we've got the hill" was Dorothy's immediate response.