

Since our country, our God - O my sire!
Demand that thy daughter expire;
Since thy triumph was bought by thy vow -
Strike the bosom that's bared for thee now!

And the voice of my mourning is o'er
And the mountains behold me no more;
If the hand that I love lay me low,
There cannot be pain in the blow!

And of this, O my father! be sure -
That the blood of thy child is as pure
As the blessing I beg ere it flow,
And the last thought that soothes me below.

Though the virgins of Salem lament,
Be the judge and the hero unbent!
I have won the great battle for thee,
And my father and country are free!

When the blood of thy giving hath gushed,
When the voice that thou lovest is hushed,
Let my memory still be thy pride,
And forget not I smiled as I died! - - - - - Lord Byron

If the teller of her story had dreamed of the high place she would come to occupy in the hearts of the generations to follow, surely he would have preserved her name. For she is known in the Bible story only as Jephthah's Daughter.

Adah holds a strategic place in the history of religion. This place is none the less secure because of the fact that she was never conscious of it. When her timbrel was silent and her dancing feet forever stilled, the tragic manner of her going ushered a new idea into the religion of Israel.

Life had been hard for Jephthah. His character had been hammered out on the rough anvil of underprivilege. After the death of his father, his haughty half-brothers had thrust him out of home and heritage, for he was the son of a harlot. Like a later David fleeing from the wrath of King Saul, Jephthah placed himself at the head of a band of freebooters, not so much for plunder as for prowess. And like David, by rigid training and strict discipline he moulded his men into an army and made them expert in the tactics of warfare.

Then his opportunity came. In the day of his country's peril from invading hordes of Ammonites, a deputation of his countrymen - his own brothers among them - swallowed their pride and came entreating him to lead a campaign against the foe. Still smarting

under the sting of their former scorn, he could not resist the temptation to drive a hard bargain. "If I become your leader in war and deliver you, will I also be your leader in peace?" In their sore extremity they consented.

Then Jephthah, rather than trust his cause to stand in its own right, tried to bargain in something of the same way with the God of Israel. Let us not judge him too harshly. For years he had lived beyond the radius of the kindly and humane aspects of the religion of Jehovah, slowly taking root in Israel. Despite the well-meant attempt of the translator to soften the situation to "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house . . . shall surely be the Lord's", sound Bible scholarship demands "Whosoever". Jephthah promised to offer a human sacrifice. The custom was common enough among his pagan associates and by no means unknown in Israel. Victory over the Ammonites was important on every count. As a man who had faced a thousand hazards of life and death, he merely took a long chance that the destined victim would not be his daughter, his only child. Surely Jehovah would not exact that - of him. But when it so turned out, there seems to have been no thought on the part of anyone to fail, or to refuse, or even to shrink from carrying it through.

From that point in the story this noble girl becomes the dominant figure. What makes the situation at once both more and less tragic is her depth of character. Any maiden capable of such deep and high devotion to principle should have lived and been wedded and become the mother of brave sons and fair daughters. Is it strange that she asked for a reprieve of 2 months to go with her maiden companions upon the mountains to mourn over what might have been and now could never be? For motherhood was the highest destiny possible for any woman in Israel. Two months were barely enough time for her to reconcile herself to her tragic fate, turn her back upon honored wifehood and motherhood and face the darkness and uncertainty of whatever might lie beyond the swift and horrible way of sacrifice. For until Jesus came proclaiming "I am the Resurrection and the Life", the hope of life after death was dim and uncertain. Jephthah's Daughter knew only that by her death she was sharing with her father and her country in the victory God had granted. So she made her surrender of life in the clear light of day, with face uncovered and eyes unclouded. Has not Lord Byron shown true poetic insight in making her say she

would smile as she died?

The day she faced her father before the smoking altar, the faith of Israel was poised in the balance. But men like Abraham and Moses and Joshua and Gideon had not lived in vain. Already the concept of a spiritual God, to whom bribes and fantastic vows and the slaughter of virgins were hateful, was making its way. What happened before the altar that day gave new impetus to the doctrine of a Supreme Being who desires mercy rather than sacrifice. For never again is the record of religion tainted with an instance of any child, any virgin, any human being of description, anywhere, any time, offered for sacrifice upon a Hebrew altar.

Is it too fanciful to conjecture that the daughters of Israel who came together 4 days in the year to lament Jephthah's Daughter were a cult organized to promote and perpetuate this new ideal? Or that her maiden companions for that memorable 2 months upon the mountains were the chapter members of that noble order?