

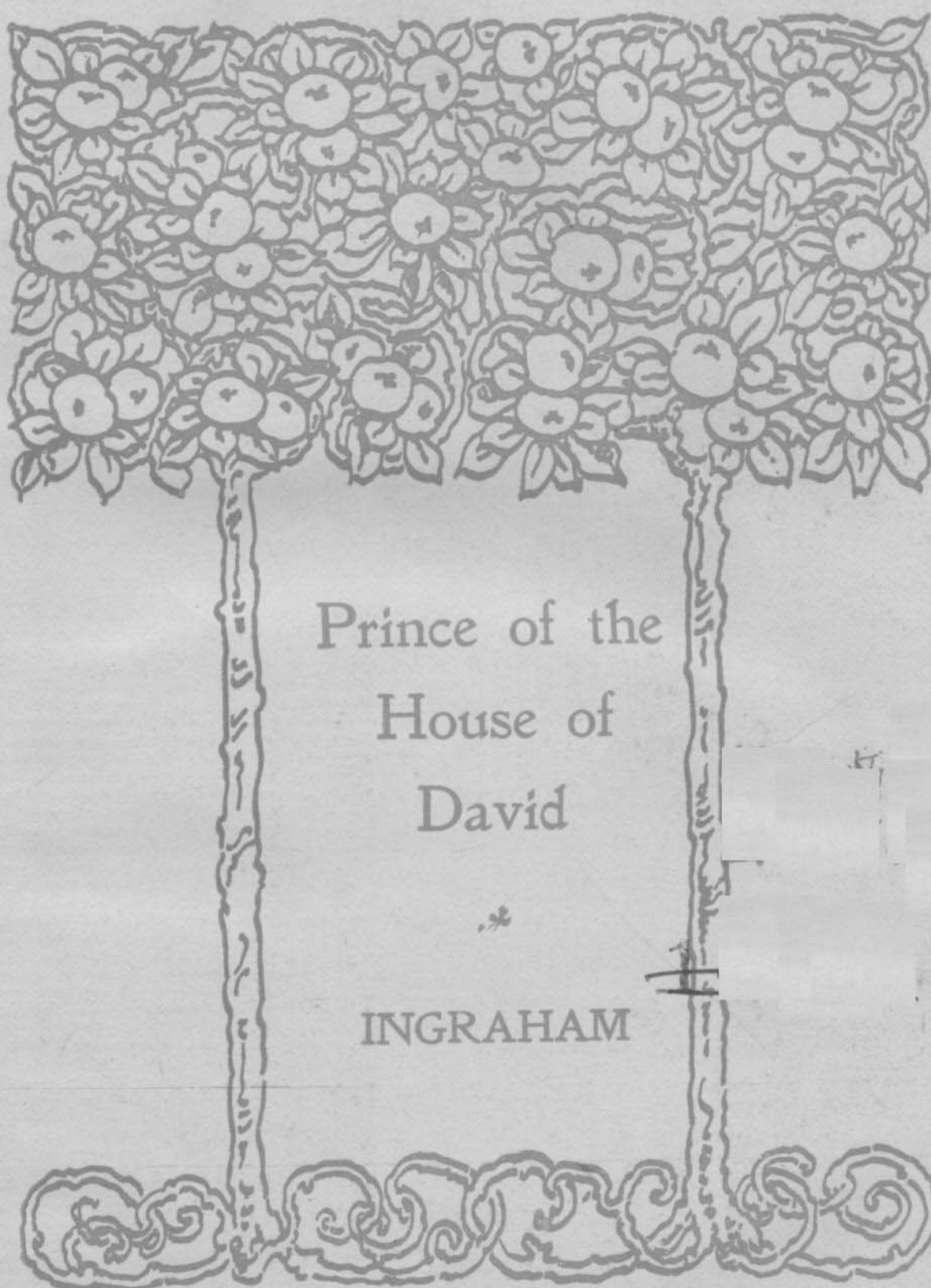


Prince of the
House of
David



INGRAHAM

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INTRODUCTION

TO THE

LETTERS OF ADINA.

Adina, the writer of the following letters, was the only child of Manasseh Benjamin, who, though an Israelite of the tribe of Judah, was a native of the Græco-Romano city of Alexandria. His ancestor was the learned David Esdras Manasseh, one of the Septuaginta (or LXX) appointed by Ptolemy Philadelphus in the year B. C. 277 to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew tongue into Greek. Esdras, with his companions, having accomplished this important work, was invited by the king to remain in Egypt, where he died at an advanced age, holding an office of trust and honor. His descendants for five generations were eminent men, and shared the confidence of the rulers of Egypt, under whom they accumulated riches which were finally inherited by Manasseh Benjamin, a man not unworthy of so eminent an ancestry. He was revered in Alexandria for his integrity, wisdom and rank, as well as for his learning and wealth, and was honored with the

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friendship of the Roman Pro-consul, Rufus Lucius Paulinus. His love and veneration for the land of his fathers, for the Holy City and Temple of Jehovah, were not lessened by his nativity as an Egyptian Jew, and as he had been in his youth sent to Jerusalem by his father, to be educated in the laws of Moses, so he resolved that his daughter should share the same privilege, be taught as beseemed a Jewish woman, and the inheritress of his name and wealth.

After a tedious journey of seventeen days by the way of Gaza, the lovely Adina at length came in sight of the walls and tower of the city of Zion. The caravan halted upon the ridge, and the Jewish travellers composing it alighted and prostrated themselves in adoration before the city of David, and the mountain of Moriah, made sacred by the footsteps of Abraham. The maiden unveiled and bowed her head with sacred awe. It was her first sight of Jerusalem—the city of her fathers, the birthplace of her parent, of which, from her earliest childhood, she had heard him speak with the profoundest reverence. As she gazed upon it, she thought of Isaac, who had been bound upon an altar on yonder height, now glittering with walls overlaid with marble and gold; of Isaiah, who had been sawn asunder in the gloomy valley at her feet; of David and his glory; of Solomon and his wisdom; of the host of Prophets who had trod its streets or wandered upon its hills. Rapidly her memory brought to her mind the history of the mighty past, of the sieges the city had withstood against the Assyrians, the Persians, the Egyptians, and the nations of the earth; of the carrying away into captivity of her countrymen; of the demolition of its walls and of its Temple; and its rebuilding by Ezra. But most of all

she dwelt with holy fear upon the thought that the presence of God, of Jehovah, had dwelt there century after century, visibly, in unbearable Fire, within the inner sanctuary of the Temple; and that there He had spoken with man, as it were, face to face. She thought also of the Ark of the Covenant, of the Tables of Stone, of Aaron's budded rod, and of the brazen serpent which were laid up in the Temple; and her heart beat with emotion such as she had never felt before. Lower, and with more awful veneration, she bent her head in grateful reverence to Him who had so distinguished above all nations her nation, above all cities the city of her fathers and of the Prophets! Then she raised her eyes in pride that she was a Jewess, and looked around proudly upon the noble landscape which, in her imagination, it seemed must be as familiar to the eyes of angels as to men, so closely had Heaven connected itself with that chosen spot.

The Arabs, her attendants, had also bowed and kneeled in the presence of the sacred towers; but it was in honor of Abraham and the patriarchs, their ancestors through Ishmael, who they believed lay with Isaac and Jacob in sepulchres upon Mount Zion.

Adina's proud glance around was arrested by the sight of a cohort of soldiers that came galloping up the ridge from the city, with a glittering eagle carried in advance.

"The Romani! The Romani!" cried the guides, and rising from their knees they remounted in haste, and used every exertion to leave the road open to the approaching troop of horse. An Israelitish muleteer, a few rods below in the path, who could not get out of the way soon enough, was over-run and thrown to

the ground, and the cavalcade swept onward to the summit of the hill, disregarding him.

The cheek of Adina paled at this sight, but it was not from fear. All her pride died away in her heart; and she forgot the glory of the past, in the sense of the present degradation. In the first exultation of her emotions at fastening her eyes upon Jerusalem, she had forgotten that the land of the Prophets and of kings anointed by God, was now a conquered Roman province. But the sight of the Roman cohort brought this painful reality to her mind, and veiling her face, she was overcome by the deepest sadness.

The troops passed her and her escort like a whirlwind of war, with ringing spurs, jingling bits, clashing shields, and the noise of the tramp of five hundred hoofs. She could no longer gaze upon the city with joy and pride. The words of Jeremiah rose to her lips:

“How hath the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in his anger! Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? The Lord has cast us off from being a nation, and the name of Israel is remembered no more!”

Tears, free and bountiful, relieved the fullness of her heart, and like a true daughter of Jerusalem, she mourned over the departed glory of her people.

Once more they rode on, winding down around a hill covered with tombs, one of which was pointed out to her by a Jewish Rabbi, under whose care she was journeying, as that of the prophet Jeremiah. Leaving this tomb on the left, they crossed a small valley, green and beautiful with groves, fountains and terraces, and thronged with a mixed multitude, both men and women, who seemed to be enjoying a

promenade there, outside the city walls; there were also booths arranged on one side of the shady walk, where merchants from all parts of the earth were selling. The Rabbi accounted for this concourse by informing her that they had arrived at Jerusalem on a great feast day. Avoiding this multitude they moved on their way to the right, and ascended a low eminence from which Jerusalem, in another point of view, burst upon them in all the splendor of its still unconquerable magnificence; for with all its vicissitudes of misfortune, in wars, sieges and desolation, the Jerusalem of the Romans was still a majestic metropolis, and, in a great degree, meriting its appellation of the "Queen of the nations."

"How beautiful!" exclaimed Adina, unconsciously reining up her camel.

"Men cannot destroy the city of God," said the Rabbi, with haughty confidence. "She will stand forever."

"Point out to me, good Rabbi Ben Israel, the prominent places! What is that frowning castle beyond the Temple which looks so strong and warlike?"

"That is the 'City of David,' the castle of the kings! It protects the Temple and town. David fortified himself in it, and so did the noble Maccabees. It was built by Melchisedec, the king of Jerusalem and the friend of our father Abraham. It is now garrisoned by a thousand Roman soldiers."

The Jewish girl sighed, and then her eyes being attracted by a graceful tower which the sunbeams of the west burnished like gold, she inquired what it was.

"The one with the palm growing by its side and nearly as lofty?" asked the Rabbi, who seemed to

take pleasure in gratifying the curiosity of his lovely protege.

“Yes, the same.”

“That is David’s Tower. Upon it David’s watchman stood when he was looking for tidings from Absalom; and the wood you see far to the north-east is the ‘wood of Ephraim,’ wherein Prince Absalom was slain”

“And what palace is that which the setting sun lights up so brilliantly, as if it were covered with plates of silver?”

“That is the palace of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, who reigns in Jerusalem as a king. But why do you shudder?” he asked, as he beheld her change countenance; but following the direction of her eyes to their right, he beheld, not far distant, a score of crosses bristling upon a small eminence opposite the city-gate; and two of the crosses held bodies nailed to them, while a guard of soldiers and a crowd of people stood near looking on and watching the writhings of the victims. The groans and execrations of one of them distinctly reached the ears of Adina.

“That is the Hill of Calvary, daughter,” said the Rabbi, with a look of outward indifference. “It is where the Romans execute their malefactors. Two have suffered to-day. It is a cruel punishment, not so mild as stoning to death; but the Romans have little feeling. Let us ride on.”

On the left they wound round the wall of a garden that seemed to be open to the public, as in some places the enclosure was thrown down. Several persons were seen within, walking up and down, or reclining under the shade of olive trees.

“That is Solomon’s garden, now called Gethsemane,” said the Rabbi; “it is now like all the royal woods, desolate.”

“Yet beautiful in its desolation. How majestically the walls of the Temple rise heavenward, seen from this valley! What noble hill, partly covered with trees, is this behind the garden?”

“Olivet, also a portion of the king’s gardens in the days of Israel’s glory. The village beyond it is Bethlehem!”

“What, the Bethlehem of Judah, out of which the prophet says shall come a Ruler over Israel?”

“The same! and we look one day to have that prophecy fulfilled. It cheers us with the assurance that Jerusalem shall not forever be trodden down of the nations, but one day have a king and governor of the royal seed of David.”

“And do any of the family of David now exist?” asked Adina, fixing her eyes earnestly upon the bearded face of the Rabbi.

“Yes, or the prophecy could not be accomplished. But they are, as far as known, poor and humble; but I have no doubt that in some part of the world among the nations, exists some of the sacred stock who are reigning princes, as Daniel and Joseph reigned in Persia and Egypt, from whence they shall come as conquerors to rule over Israel.”

“How then can they spring from yonder little village of Bethlehem?” asked the maiden.

The Rabbi looked a little embarrassed, and was about to make some reply to this difficult question, when their road was blocked up by a flock of sheep, mingled with a drove of cattle, being driven into the city for the altars of sacrifice. It was with some de-

lay they made their way through these obstacles and came to the gates of Damascus. Here they were detained by the Roman guard and made to show their passports, and to pay thirty sesterces for every camel, and half as many for each mule in the caravan.

The scene in the streets was quite bewildering to Adina, who had been journeying so many days through a desert; but as the dwelling of the relations of her father was near the gate, she was soon in the arms of her friends, who, though they had never seen her before, received her affectionately, as much for her father's sake, who had commended her to their protection, as for her own prepossessing loveliness.

Just entering her seventeenth year, the daughter of the rich Alexandrian was in the prime of female charms. Her hair was an auburn brown, long, and shining like gold; her face oval, and transparently olive in its color, tinted with the least perceptible roseate; her eyes large, and of the most splendid light and glory of expression; her nose straight and finely outlined, and her mouth exquisitely shaped with an expression of heavenly sweetness.

Having been kindly welcomed, and finding every preparation made for her comfort and happiness, she gave a few days to repose, and then, on the return of the caravan, addressed the following letter to her father. This letter was followed by many others, all of which it is our intention to give to the reader, as they are written at a period the most interesting of any other of which history takes record. The first letter is dated, according to the Jewish chronology, three years before the crucifixion of our Saviour.

LETTERS FROM ADINA.

LETTER I.

My Dear Father:—My first duty, as it is my highest pleasure, is to comply with your command to write you as soon as I arrived at Jerusalem; and this letter, while it conveys to you intelligence of my arrival, will confirm to you my filial obedience.

I will not fail to write you by every caravan that leaves here monthly for Cairo; and if there are more frequent opportunities, my love for you, dear father, and sympathy for you in your separation from me, will prompt me to avail myself of them.

My journey hither occupied many days, Rabbi Ben Israel says seventeen, but although I kept the number up to ten, I soon became too weary to keep the account. When we travelled in sight of the sea, which we did for three days, I

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enjoyed the majesty of the prospect, it seemed so like the sky stretched out upon the earth. I also had the good fortune to see several barges, which the Rabbi, who was always ready to gratify my thirst for information, informed me were Roman galleys, bound some to Sidon and others into the Nile; and after one of these latter, as it was going to you, I sent a prayer and a wish. Just as we were leaving the seashore to turn off into the desert, I saw a wrecked vessel. It looked so helpless and bulky, with its huge black body all out of the water, that it seemed to me like a great sea-monster, the Behemoth, stranded and dying; and I felt like pitying it. The Rabbi gave me to understand that it had come from Alexandria, laden with wheat, bound for Italia, and been cast ashore in a storm. How terrible a tempest must be upon the sea! I was in hopes to have seen a Leviathan, but was not gratified in the wish. The good Rabbi, who seemed to know all things, told me that they seldom appear now in the Middle Sea, but are seen beyond the pillar of Hercules at the world's end.

At Gaza we stopped two days. We entered the gateway of which Samson carried away the gates, and I was shown the hill two miles to the south-east where he left them. Many other places of interest were shown me, especially the field, which our path led across, where he put to flight the Philistine hosts with much slaughter. A lion's cave was also pointed out to me, out of which came the lion which Samson slew, and upon which he made his famous riddles.

The dry well into which the ten Patriarchs lowered the Prince Joseph, their brother, was also shown me by our Arab guide, and the rock on which the Ishmaelites told down the pieces of silver. I fancied the old Arab related the occurrence with more elation than was needful, as if he took pride in perpetrating the fact that our noble ancestor had once been the purchased slave of theirs. I noticed, several times during the journey, that the Ishmaelites of Edom in our caravan took every occasion to elevate their own race to the disparagement of the sons of Israel; indeed, Aben Hussuff, our white-bearded chief of the caravan, in a wordy discussion with Rabbi Ben Israel at Isaac's well, where we encamped, would have it that Isaac was the son of the bond-woman, and Ishmael the true heir, but disinherited and cast out through the wiles of the bond-woman, who would have her own son the inheritor. But, of course, I was too well instructed in the history of my fathers to give heed to such a fable; though the Arabs all took part with their chief, and contended for the truth of what he asserted as warmly and zealously as the learned Rabbi did for the truth of his own side.

The morning of the last day of our journey we caught sight of the Sea of Sodom and Gomorrah, at a great distance to the east. How my pulse quickened at beholding that fearful spot so marked by the wrath of Jehovah! I seemed to see in imagination the heavens on fire above it, and the flames and smoke ascending as from a

great furnace, as on that fearful day when they were destroyed, with all that beautiful surrounding plain, which we are told was one vast garden of beauty. How calm and still lay now that sluggish sea beneath a cloudless sky! We held it in sight many hours, and once caught a glimpse of the Jordan north of it, looking like a silver thread; yet, near as it appeared to be, I was told it was a good day's journey for a camel to reach its shores.

After losing sight of this melancholy lake, the glassy sepulchre of cities and their countless dwellers, our way lay along a narrow valley for sometime, when, all at once, on reaching an eminence, Jerusalem appeared, like a city risen out of the earth, it stood before us so unexpectedly; for we were still, as it were, in the desert; yet so near on the side of our approach does the desert advance to its walls, that it was not two miles off when we beheld it.

I cannot, my dear father, describe to you my emotions on beholding the Holy City! They have been experienced by millions of our people—they were similar to your own as you related them to me. All the past, with its mighty men who walked with Jehovah, came up to my mind, overpowering me with the amazing weight. The whole history of the sacred place rushed to my memory, and compelled me to bow my head, and worship and adore at the sight of the Temple, where God once (alas, why does He no longer visit earth and His Holy House?) dwelt in the flaming Shechinah, and made known the