

A SON OF SHAME WHO ACHIEVED GREATNESS

When we begin to read the eleventh chapter of the book of Judges our attention is arrested by the introductory statement, "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour." This remark delights us, excites our expectations and prepares us for a real feast as we begin the study of his career. However, when we read the rest of the statement we are amazed and are led to anticipate ignobility instead of heroism for it says, "And he was the son of a harlot." We immediately ask, Can human life rise above its source? Can the man who is born of sin and in sin be anything except a sinner?

In seeking an adequate answer to these questions we must face all the facts mentioned in the Scriptures concerning the career of this son of shame. As we contemplate these facts in the history of the life of Jephthah let us outline his career and observe it in the following manner:---

I. His Vices II. His Vow III. His Victory IV. His Virtues
May we get before us very briefly--

I. HIS VICIES

The first three verses in this chapter teach us that--

1. He was a product of vice.

"He was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begat Jephthah"
He was greatly wronged in his very birth. He was the son of a father who was unfaithful to his marriage vows. The father had sown his wild oats which he also reaped and had to suffer for, but the sad part of it is that the boy had to suffer for it also. The boy had to suffer on account of the father's sins for which he was not responsible. This boy had an unclean mother also. She was not one of those unfortunate souls who had made one false step for the sake of the man she loved. She was a professional outcast who made it her business day after day to sell herself over the counters of iniquity. What greater blow could strike the life of any lad than to begin life as an illegitimate son? This boy had a bad chance from the start. The first eyes into which he looked were the eyes of an unclean mother. The first lips that kissed him were lips soiled and stained by years of sinful living. Poor little outcast baby. He missed so much. He was a child of sin bereft of the inspiration of a good mother's life and the sweet uplift of a pious home. Such was his evil heritage.

2. He was a victim of vice.

"And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman."
Very early he was branded with a shame not his own. Society is so unkind and unjust in its condemnation of those innocent ones who are the victims of the sins of others. Society does not recognize that a child is no more to blame for those circumstances than it is to be blamed for the darkness of the night or for the currents of the sea. However, as another example of social injustice Jephthah was blamed. This story affords a solemn warning as to the wrong of treating a child born out of wedlock with contempt. Ugly names were flung at Jephthah before he was old enough to know their real meaning. He was not allowed to play with those more fortunately born than he and often the door was shut in his face. His childhood must have been very dreary for he had no worthy example, no mother's affection, no happy and holy home, and no wise and weighty counsel from a father. When he became a young man the parental estate was divided. He was disinherited. By his own half-brothers he was kicked out of his father's house, forced to flee for his life, driven forth into the wide world to shift for himself. The only motive for this was to keep him from sharing in his father's inheritance. This is truly a wretched revelation of family spirit. Such was his estate.

3. He became a leader in vice.

"Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob; and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him."