


NEWS AND VIEWS FOR WOMEN READERS

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Reading furnishes the mind only with the materials of knowledge—it is thinking that makes what we read ours.

A "QUITTER" WHO "CAME BACK"

The International Sunday School Lesson For September 9th is, "John Mark."—Acts 12 :12, 25, 13:5; 15:36-40; II. Timothy 4:11.

By WILLIAM T. ELLIS.

Wandering to and fro, in and about Jerusalem, I find myself keeping company with many old friends of the Bible. I begrudge the time I am obliged to give to my work upon political conditions in Palestine; for the Scripture characters are more companionable than some of the flesh-and-blood folk I am called upon to interview. Most of the so-called "sacred places," or "holy sites" or shrines of Jerusalem do not attract me at all; on the contrary. Thus, I have declined even to go into the reputed home of John Mark, the house of the Upper Room, where the Last Supper was held, according to tradition. I prefer the spiritual and historical reality to the disillusioning attempts to pander to superstition by material relics.

One may play hide-and-seek over a great deal of geography with this elusive young man, John Mark; whom we first knew as the son of his mother, Mary; then as an attendant upon the first missionaries, Paul and Barnabas; then as a "quitter," who turned back from the hardships of the tour; then as a cause of dissension and separation between those two great pioneers, Paul and Barnabas; then he passes into obscurity as a companion to Barnabas; and emerges as a profitable companion of Paul in Rome; and finally takes his place in the world's small gallery of immortals as the author of the earliest and shortest Biography of Jesus, the Gospel According to Mark.

Mysterious Man at the Arrest.
Imagination toys with the figure of Mark, over on the Mount of Olives; for probably he was that mysterious young man, of whom we have a record only in Mark's own Gospel, who stayed by Jesus in Gethsemane after the apostles had fled, and himself escaped arrest only by leaving his clothes in the hands of the police, while he fled naked into the night. (Mark 14:51, 52.) The biographer's modesty probably kept him from mentioning his own name in his book; and the family of Mark was so closely affiliated with Jesus that it is entirely probable that the ardent, venturesome youth would follow the little company as it left his mother's home, after partaking of the Last Supper.

Certainly, the dramatic incident is wholly in keeping with the character of Mark as we know it. He was moved by noble impulses, which failed him in a test. His story suggests Joseph Conrad's "Lord Jim." Something of the tragedy that must have pervaded the house of the Last Supper evidently possessed the young man Mark; and he went with the heavy-hearted little band that followed Jesus out of the city gate and across the brook to the dark gray grove of olive trees. High heroism swelled in his breast, echoing the resolute sentiments which perhaps he had heard Peter utter that night: "If I must die with Thee, I will not

deny Thee." Mark's ardor and loyalty outlasted that of Peter, for at the arrest of Jesus, he remained true when the apostles had run away. But when the officers laid hands on him—when the real test came—then his courage collapsed and he fled, naked, into the friendly dark. He missed the supreme opportunity to be a comrade of the arrested Christ, and perhaps also a companion on the Cross. What a price to pay for lack of a little courage! Today the nameless young man (all the ages would have rung with his name had he stuck out to the end) is of the company of Peter and Nicodemus and the band who failed Christ in the ultimate crisis.

"A Soft Son of Fortune."
One delights to muse upon Mark; to find a reason for his zeal in the beginnings and his failure in the emergency. Perhaps he was of the over-educated, over-refined, over-sensitive type that sometimes is produced by circumstances of ease and indulgence. Probably his family was rich; it was in his mother's house that the Christians gathered with Jesus; and it was thither, after the resurrection, that Peter naturally repaired when released from prison. Legend says it was Mark's family that provided the ass on which Jesus rode in the triumphal entry; and that the Garden of Gethsemane was part of the family property. All that money and devotion could do for the young man Mark had been done. He evidently had fine sensibilities and the loftiest purposes. But in action he qualified; his exquisite-nervous organization shrank from physical hardship and danger.

The young man was really not a coward; simply he was over-engined in his nervous system. Before we speak contemptuously of Mark as a "quitter" let us consider the exquisite self-torture that he must have inflicted upon his own spirit, in contemplation of his defaults in deeds of decision. And, in the end, his soul mastered his body and his nerves.

In modern slang, Mark was "soft" in the muscles of his spirit. He had not mastered the truth that it is a worse fate to be afraid than really to be dead. As I have travelled during recent months in Bible lands, over the roads where robberies and murders have not been uncommon of late, I have marvelled to find how big danger bulks in many persons' thinking. If this is a sign of the times, then we must beware; since there is no future for a timid man or a timid race. Only a person of ignoble mind would ever quote, "Better be a live dog than a dead lion." That is a dog's creed. Neither God nor man may expect anything from a coward.

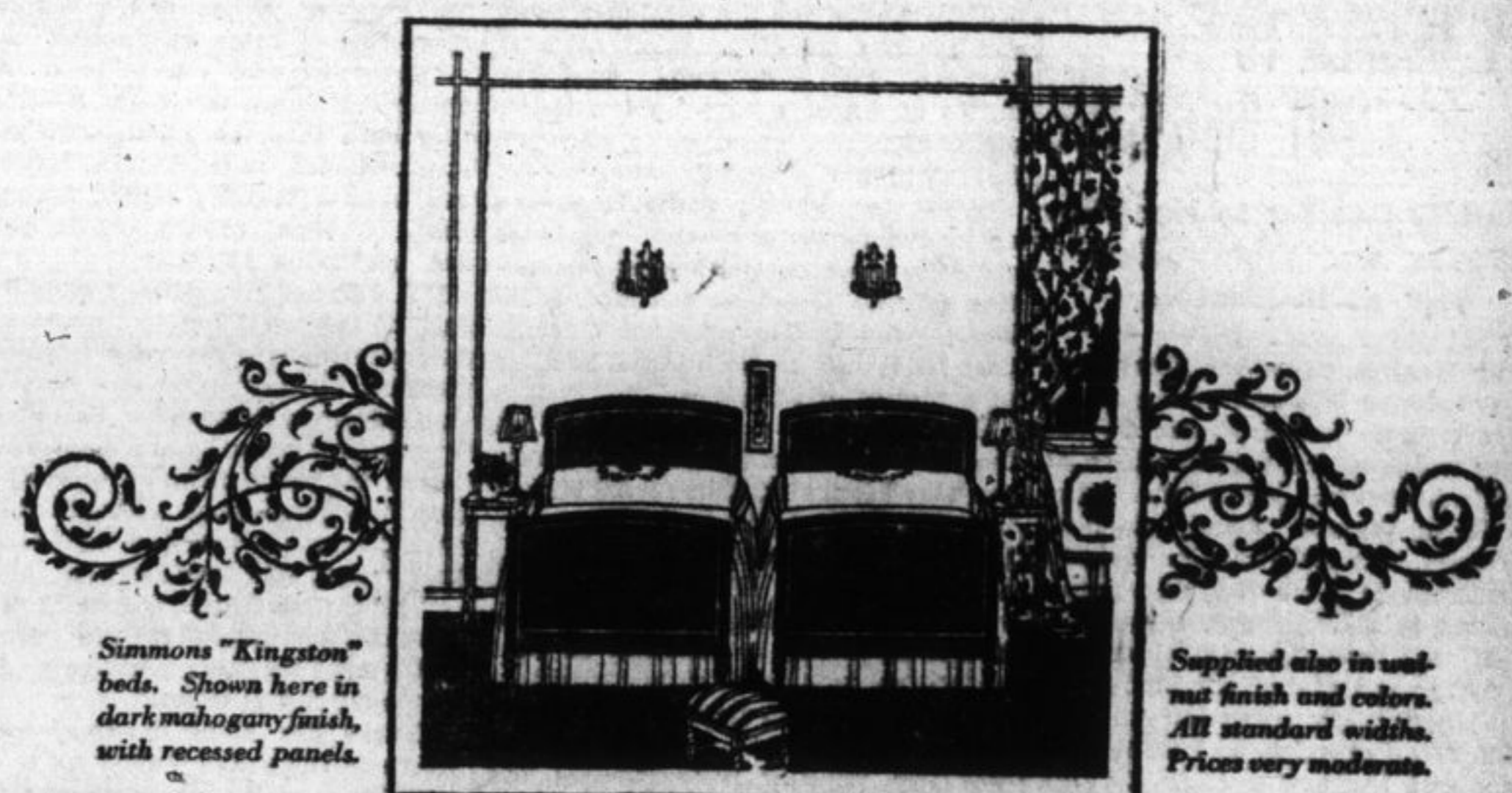
When The Saints Quarrelled.
It may not be edifying, even though it is rather encouraging to our mortal frailty, to behold the pioneer missionaries of Christianity quarrelling and parting to go separate ways, all over a young man who had failed them on their joint adventure. When Paul and Barnabas were about to start out on their second circuit, Barnabas wanted to take along Mark (who possibly was a relative; and certainly a highly-connected and influential youth,) but sturdy old Paul, with his keen sense of honor and justice, refused to agree, because Mark had "fallen down" on the previous trip. Confronted by the hardships and perils of Pamphilia, Mark had forsaken his friends and leaders and turned back. He had forfeited the right to be trusted.

Wise, stern old Paul was correct, but Barnabas was compassionate. So the quarrel ended by Barnabas taking Mark off to Cyprus—and that is the last we hear of Barnabas. Paul had to get along without an attendant; there was no sophisticated young city man, like Mark, with a knowledge of the world's ways, to look out for lodgings and buy food and arrange transportation, and in general to attend to the "temporalities" of the mission. Paul, as well as Mark, suffered from the defection of Mark of the faint heart.

Nobody may think, however, that Paul harbored a grudge. Nursing grudges is small business for small spirits. He was too big for it. And after Mark had found himself, he again found a place with Paul; so that from his prison in Rome the aged apostle wrote to Timothy: "Only Luke is with me. Take Mark and bring him with thee; for he is profitable to me for the ministry."

So the young man, once a "quitter," had "come back." What a biography of soul struggle between the two phases of Mark's career! Through bitter experiences and soul-lashings beyond imagination he had won to self-mastery and courage. He had proved the new temper of his spirit by many an ordeal. He had become fit to be once more the welcome companion of Paul, the hero. "A man may be down, but he is never out." Character-development is possible right up to the end. There is no cessation to the soul's struggle after perfection. I once knew a dear old lady, now in heaven, who was as solicitous as a young girl about improving her mind and her conduct. Too much introspection may paralyze the nerves of action; but a measure of it is necessary to growth.

A Poor Traveller: A Good Writer.
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In this world a man is only worth what he wishes to be worth.

Those who attain any excellence commonly spend life in one pursuit for excellence is not often gained upon easier terms.

Many seem to pass on from youth to decrepitude without any reflection on the end of life.



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