

The Wonderful
Pathway . .



I. LILIAS TROTTER.

The Wonderful Pathway.



LONG ago there lived two boys in a district among the mountains. The elder was born in the castle among the rocks above, and the younger in a hut among the pastures below.

The young prince Si Hassan was a splendid lad, strong and beautiful, and he knew not the sight of fear.

I know not what drew out his heart to little Omar down in the village, but so it was, that he noticed him among all the other little goatherds, and he sought to have him often up at the Castle, where he would tell him stories of wonderful things, and show him much that the other boys had never seen.

And Omar loved the Prince, and had in his heart to serve him when he should be a grown man.

And it came to pass one day, when they were together in the Castle, Si Hassan said to Omar: "See here, oh my brother,

to-day I will show thee something that no one else knows, of all the comrades in the country round"; and with that he took down a key and opened a little door in the wall of the room, and this led into another room, and yet another, till at last they came to a door that seemed to open into darkness.

But Si Hassan took up a lantern that stood by it, and struck a light, and said to Omar, "Follow me, and keep close on my steps." And as they shut the door behind them Omar looked around, and found they were in a cave, whose walls were hung with stones that glittered in the lamplight like jewels, and though all was dark it was full of strange beauty. And Si Hassan led him further and further, till he felt as if he were in a dream.

There was a noise of water, and as they went on, the path grew very narrow, and mounted rapidly, with the rock on one side, and a steep bank that descended on the other side to the stream that ran below. And sometimes, when a turn in the path came, they had to swing themselves from crag to crag, but always there was Si Hassan, with his strong arm, to draw him along, and Omar went, half frightened, half delighted, after his guide, wondering how the matter would end.

And after a long time there came the glimmer of a faint light, as of day-dawn, and it grew brighter with every step: and

at last, as they went round a corner, came another surprise. The daylight was streaming through some juniper bushes that grew over the cave's mouth, and as they pushed them aside, Omar found that they were on the face of a cliff high up on the mountain side, and far below ran a river, and beyond was a sunny land of hills and plains as far as the eye could travel. For they had come right through the mountain on which they lived, to the valleys that lay behind, which Omar had never seen, though he knew that the possessions of Si Hassan's house extended far that way. And when at last they turned to go back, and the castle was reached again, and then his hut in the prickly pear hedge, he asked himself still whether he waked or slept : and he hid all in his heart and kept it there.

And soon after this the days of his visiting at the Castle ended, for his father died, and he was sent off to work at the farm of some of his cousins, away off in his own valley. And these cousins had been poisoned in mind against the Prince by false reports, and would never allow him to go back to the Castle, and though Si Hassan often thought of his little friend of long ago, and asked of his welfare and sent him messages, the messages never reached him, and he concluded Si Hassan had forgotten him.

But it came to pass, when ten years were gone, it was told Si Hassan that one wished to speak with him. And when the visitor entered, Si Hassan knew at once that it was Omar, though he had grown into a tall lad of the age of seventeen. And he bade him be seated: but he saw that he was trembling and white as he sank on the divan, and that there was a stain of blood on his sleeve. And Si Hassan spoke and said—"It is thou at last, O my little brother, and thou art grown to be a man. What aileth thee? Welcome in that thou art come."

And Omar had only one word to say, and it was this—"O Si Hassan, I am come that thou mayest save me. I have seen nothing of thee all these years, but thou wast in truth a brother to me in the time past: be a brother now." And Si Hassan answered and said: "Verily I am thy brother, now and always: tell me thy trouble."

And Omar answered: "One is even now at my heels who seeks my life; he is an enemy of my father's house, and I have let myself get under his hand by my own folly and heedlessness, and when I would get free from him this morning he struck me and wounded me, and he has sworn by a great oath that next time his knife shall go through my heart. He knows that I have fled here for hiding, and he will be in wait for me from the

moment I go back out of that courtyard door. O my brother, I know not how thou canst help me, but my help lies in thee."

And Si Hassan thought a moment only, and then he answered, "O Omar, dost thou remember the day when I showed thee that dark passage through the mountain, wilt thou come with me through it again? Thine enemy knows nothing of it, and he will wait for thee in vain until thou art far away. Down in that valley and beyond thou wilt find thy way by this ring, by which I pledge thee to my service; thou canst show it to one after another whose names I will tell thee, who will help thee on thy journey, till thou dost come to the greater Castle where my home is now, and where thine enemy will never dare to follow thee. There I will meet with thee again, in the hour that God wills. Wilt thou come?"

And the Prince needed not to wait for an answer, for it shone in the eyes of Omar while he was yet speaking, and he with his own hands washed and bound Omar's wounded arm. And Omar rose up and followed Si Hassan, and behold the dream of his boyhood returned once more; there was the last door, and there was the lantern of long ago, and there, as the door opened, was the cave that was dark, and yet glittering with lights like diamonds. Only now, as he followed close on the steps of the

Prince, it was not in curiosity that he followed, but with the sense of wonderful relief that the door was shut on his enemy, and that he had escaped with his life. The path was long and dark and slippery and dangerous, and as of old it needed the strong arm of his deliverer again and again to bring him round the difficult corners, and he helped him all the more tenderly for his wound. But at length once more there came the glimmer of light from afar, and then the last turning, where sun and air and blue sky and far distances broke through the juniper bushes. And now he could see somewhat that on that day of his boyhood he had not noticed—how that a tiny narrow way led down the face of the cliff, so faint and so narrow that no one could see it from afar. And down that winding path the Prince went with him, into the oleanders of the river bed; and there he gave him the ring that was the pledge that henceforth he belonged to him and to his service. And Omar bowed low before him to receive it, and Si Hassan watched him as he went on his way with a look of joy and love. For his little brother of long ago had come back to him, to be his faithful vassal to his life's end.

I think, O thou who readest, that thou dost know this story's meaning. It may be that long ago thou didst go to the schools of the Massihine, and didst learn to know something of the Prince

of Heaven, Who is our Lord the Christ. And this was because He had chosen thee out from the many thousands of thy fellows, who have heard nothing of Him, and know Him not. And it may be in that time of the past thou didst learn a little of what it meant to follow Him, and didst get a glimpse of the beauty of His Kingdom. But in those days thou didst never come to Him to be saved, for thou didst not know thy danger.

But now, O brother, thou art grown past thy days of childhood, and though thou hast remembered something of its teaching, the greater part has faded away. And the temptations of life have come upon thee like a flood, and thou hast got under the hand of Satan, thine enemy, who is following thee, seeking thine eternal ruin, and already he has wounded thee sorely with the wounds of sin.

There remains to thee but one way of escape. Go to thy Brother, Christ the Lord. He is wise enough and strong enough to save thee. Throw thyself on Him. By His death for the sin of the world He has opened a door of escape that those around thee know not of. It may be He will have to lead thee through a dark and lonely cave-passage, but His hand will be there to hold thee up, and His leading will bring thee into a wonderful light beyond. And in the light of that new land into which He

brings thee, He will give thee the seal that thou art His: and His people will recognize that token, and help thee in the way that leads to the great city of Heaven, where His Home is now, and where thou shalt serve Him for ever. Only be brave and fear not, and turn not back. "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found: call ye upon Him while He is near."

But it may be that until to-day thou hast heard but the name of our Lord the Christ, and dost understand but little of the meaning of the story. Only thus far dost thou understand, that thou hast let thyself get under the power of Satan, and that peace and joy are far from thee. And though thou knowest not our Lord Christ, He knows thee, and would help thee, for in the days when He was on the earth He came to be the brother of every man, and He knows all the temptations that are round thee, and can make thee a way of escape. And if thou wilt enquire after Him of us, the Massihine, and wilt call to Him, where He is now, exalted at the right hand of God, to be a Prince and a Saviour, He will welcome thee, and bring thee into light and liberty, where thou mayest serve Him evermore. Amen.

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