

MOSES.

BY EDITH STOW.

CROWDED into the southern part of the peninsula of Sinai is a terrific group of sandstone rocks, a rising tableland cut across by jagged ravines and edged by shivered mountain peaks. In a few places these ravines hold little, cup-like plains, but down into them no mountain torrents rush, no lakes mirror the sky. This lack of water on the tableland breeds an oppressive silence there, a stillness that heightens inconceivably the awful grandeur of the rocks. Moreover there can be heard at times strange noises up among the mountain tops and flapping winds rush down the ravines; and then such stray sounds are reverberated, hurled back and forth from peak to peak. The tribes call it the Mount of God and shun it.

Up the crevice of one of the ravines a shepherd leads his flock seeking a pasture for them. Behind him is the lower wilderness where men wander; before him, the mountain rugged and bare. Up the steep path they climb slowly until they reach the lip of a little plain. The sheep wander off nibbling about him in zig-zag lines and he begins to sing to himself a low, monotonous shepherd song. Men do it for dread of the silence. So the night comes on him. Then follow days of this one after another in which he leads his sheep from plain to plain as the herbage is consumed, these dumb, breathing things, until the loneliness of the place presses upon him. The silence conquers; the song ceases.

In his solitude he turns inward upon himself for companionship, rehearsing the tales he has heard in the tents, tales of the old home of their fathers to which these children of poverty and oppression clung so proudly, tales of vast possessions which this homeless tribe fed hope upon. In those dragging hours of solitude these grow very real to him. His imagination touches them with the qualities

of his own great soul; with quick impulse, with indomitable courage, with sweeping generosity. They take plot and sequence in his mind. The longing for the old home, the crying belief which was an inheritance in his blood that some day they should acquire it all again, this is his theme.

Then upon that mind brewing within itself the associations of the place begin to work their effect. He is alone in the innermost recesses of a wilderness where a God has his dwelling; alone, they two; what if—. Out of the superstition of that awful grandeur, out of the emptiness of his hands from labor, out of the loneliness of his one mighty soul, a vision arises and a voice speaks. So the silence becomes a vital thing. Something is touched for a birth within him. He feels God stoop near in the mystery of it. With anguish of spirit, with ecstasy of hope he feels it shape itself for the end until it is born—an immortal purpose.

With a mighty swing like the swinging of a lever he turns to his brethren and from the depth of his mountain fastness he can (in thought) see them and can hear their exceeding bitter cry swelled into a chorus of despair. The limits of his personality are swept away: he spreads through the tribe, bearing every burden, enduring every anguish.

“Go rescue them from this!” commands the voice. “Go lead them forth!”

“Forth?”

“Yes, to the land they shall inherit.”

So he accepts the mission opened before him. God-like through confidence, magnetic through sympathy, he leads them out, his motley thousands following him as men always follow such a leader. And what a throng they were, those ignorant, herding things; men with kneading-troughs on their shoulders and the pilfered wealth of Egypt in their hands, women carrying their children, the restless mob of the nation; stupid, timid, earth-bent, clamorous.

“God, God, the remembered of generations,” this is the cry of the leader. “Come to God and hear him,” he urges eagerly, leading them on towards Sinai. But the enthusiasm of his tribe, being only a reflected passion, filters away.

“Are there no graves in Egypt?” they cry in their terror. But he does not heed this.

“Come, come,” he urges joyously.

They break forth in rebellion against him, but he pleads with them, anxious only to bring them where he may share his great

prize. So at last he stands with his throng before Sinai. All thought of self has risen from him and been swept away like mist by the wind.

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself," he shouts triumphantly in the words of the God whose voice sounds in his ears. O great heart! you cannot lead them up the sheer heights of ecstasy!

But they cannot understand him, poor things how can they! He had taken them from a drowsy, mellow country, a land shadowed by flitting wings and they had fainted on burning deserts and drunk from wells of bitter water until now at last he had brought them to desolation complete. What wonder that in their terror they long for the comforts of the old religion and beg to return to servitude where at least was food.

There is a shock of disappointment in his voice and then a ring of anger. "See thou sayest unto me 'Bring up this people,'" he cries out against his God.

Then a sense of helplessness settles upon him.

"I pray thee show me thy way that I may know thee," he pleads.

It is a desperate struggle.

"My presence shall go with thee and I shall give thee rest."

"If thy presence go not with me carry me not up hence."

"I will do this thing."

"I beseech thee show me thy glory."

So he prays alone, welding his answers out of the very metal of his soul. And when he comes to them this man has grown yet mightier from the fullness of that experience.

"I will tell you what it is he speaks to me," he says, stifling a regret for the loss of a tribe-wide revelation which until then he had anticipated for them.

"Thou shalt inherit the land," he still asserts, but there sounds in his voice a new ring of human courage.

There was never a greater victory through the reaching soul of a man, for out of his own ecstasy he divined the interpretation of God and held it a fixed thing which moved always before him. He vowed himself to a serving companionship with this soul-divined God and lived with Him on transcendent heights of human possibility where few can even breathe. And more than that, he held Him up before the eyes of a whole unwilling nation, he forced them to bow down and worship Him, to serve Him, to follow Him through sufferings innumerable.

I hold this to be true that God reveals Himself to man in the measure that man is able to realize the truth. God is a constant, not a pulsing force, and the man who accomplishes great things for the rest of his brethren climbs the heights of human possibility and on the summits of life he converses with God.