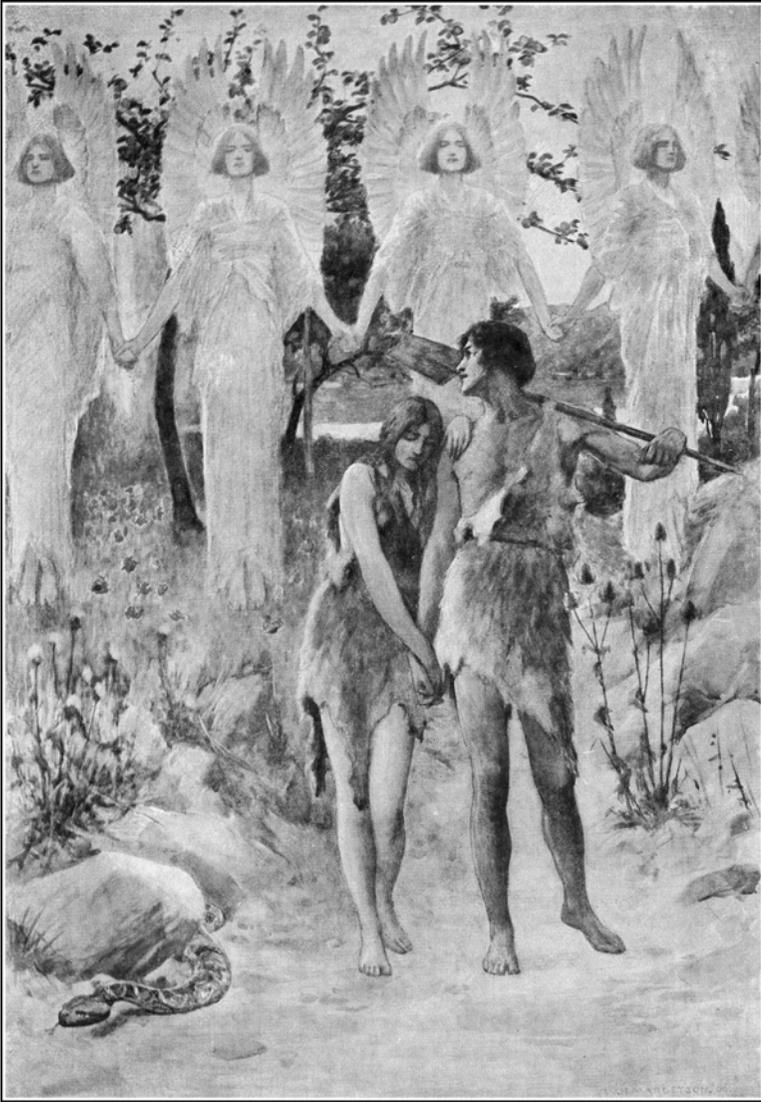


**THE NURSERY BOOK OF
BIBLE STORIES**



“He placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubims.”

Genesis iii. 24.

THE NURSERY BOOK OF BIBLE STORIES

**BY
AMY STEEDMAN**



**YESTERDAY'S CLASSICS
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THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD

WHEN night comes down and everything is dark and black, we sometimes are a little afraid, for we cannot see all the pleasant things around us, and it makes us feel lonely to be in the dark. The very first thing of all we want is light.

So it was when God made the world that the very first thing He did was to make the light. It had all been quite dark until He looked down and said, "Let there be light," and then the beautiful light came.

There were many things to be done after that. There was the light to be divided into day and night, and the sky and the land and the sea to be made and set all in their right places; and as God worked He was glad, because He saw that it was all going to be very beautiful and very good. But still the earth was quite bare, worse even than the garden in winter when all the flowers are dead, because there had never been any trees or flowers or grass at all. So then God made a glad springtime to come bursting over the earth, and flowers and trees began to grow, and green leaves and buds and corn began to sprout; and instead of a bare, dark world there was a great garden, all clothed in a beautiful green dress and starred with flowers.

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Now there is one thing which a garden needs above everything else, and that is sunshine. So God made the sun to shine down from the blue sky in the day-time, and he made the silver moon that hangs up there like a great lamp in the night-time, and all the stars that shine “like diamonds in the sky.” Spring, summer, autumn, and winter—God arranged them all, so that everything should grow in its right time.

It was a very silent earth still, for trees and flowers grow very quietly; but soon the sweet sound of music came stealing into the world, for, after making all the fishes that swim in the seas and rivers and streams, God made the dear birds that chirp and twitter as they fly about. He taught them, too, to make their nests, and bring up the baby birds, so that we should always have birds in the world to sing their songs to us.

Now in the air there was the sound of fluttering wings, and in the water the fishes swam and flashed their tails, and only the earth was waiting for the animals and insects that were to make it their home. So God next made all the beasts and cattle and all the creeping things, and when He looked down He saw it was all very good.

Then it was that God made the greatest thing of all, for it was something that was made “in His own image,” which means like God Himself. He made the first man Adam, and the first woman Eve, and He made them different from all the other things which He had created, because He put into them some of His own life, the part of us which we call our soul.

THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD

At first the two people whom God had made were very happy indeed. They lived in the most beautiful garden, where all the most wonderful trees and flowers grew, where there was nothing to harm them and everything to make them happy. All the animals and birds were their friends, and Adam gave all of them their names; and there was no suffering or pain in the garden, because everything was good.

Then a sad day came, when Eve was disobedient and all the happiness was spoilt. God had said that Adam and Eve might enjoy all the delicious fruit that grew in the garden except the fruit of one special tree which they were forbidden to touch. But the tempter came, and whispered to Eve that it was very hard that she should not taste that fruit, and that God would not really punish her if she did. Poor Eve was not wise enough to listen to the voice inside her, which told her she must not disobey God; and so she did as the tempter suggested, and all the happiness in that beautiful garden came to an end.

Neither Adam nor Eve had ever known before what fear meant; but now that they had disobeyed God, they were afraid to meet Him, and went and hid themselves. And God was very sorrowful to think His children had disobeyed Him, and by their wrongdoing had brought sin and death into the beautiful world which He had made so good.

No longer could Adam and Eve live in the fair garden, for they must be punished; and God sent them

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out, and placed His angels with flaming swords to guard the way back.

It had been easy work for Adam in the garden to look after all the growing things; but now it was very different. Thorns and thistles, and all kinds of weeds began to spring up and to choke the good plants, and Adam had to toil hard from morning till night; and Eve too soon learned what it meant to be tired and sorrowful.

But even then there was still some happiness left, for God sent Eve a great gift, the gift of a little son. She called his name Cain. And afterwards another baby boy was born, and this second boy she called Abel.

Perhaps she thought she could never be very sorrowful again, now that she had two boys to love and care for; but, sad to say, as the boys grew up, sorrow and sin crept in again. Cain began to be jealous of his younger brother. From angry, jealous thoughts came angry words, until at last followed angry blows, and Cain killed his brother out in the fields, where he



Cain

thought no one could see him. But he forgot that God sees everything we do, even when we think we are quite alone, and his punishment followed swiftly. God put a

THE BEAUTIFUL WORLD

mark upon his brow, and sent him to wander alone out into the world, far away from his home and his mother. Then Eve knew, even better than before, all the trouble and pain and suffering which sin had brought into the world.

NOAH AND THE RAINBOW OF HOPE

As God looked down upon the beautiful world He had made, it grieved Him to see how it was spoilt by the wickedness of the people who lived upon it. No one tried to be good or to obey God's laws, and as time went on they grew worse and worse, until God was sorry that He had made the world at all.

“I will destroy it,” God said, “both man and beast, and the creeping things, and the fowls of the air.”

But there was just one man in all the world who loved God, and tried to please Him; and in the end God determined not to destroy everything, but to save this man and his family, and some of the animals and birds and creeping things as well. And so God told the man, whose name was Noah, exactly what to do—how he was to build a great ark of safety, to be ready for the time when God would destroy the world by a great flood.

All the rest of the people in the world went on enjoying themselves and doing just as they liked, never thinking of God at all. Only Noah worked with all his might to obey God's directions. He tried to warn the people of what was coming, but they only laughed at

NOAH AND THE RAINBOW OF HOPE

him and his work. What was this curious kind of ship that he was building? It surely must be meant to float upon the water. But Noah was building it inland, far away from any sea, and no one had ever beheld such a huge vessel before.

“Where is the great sea on which it is going to float?” asked the people; and they only scoffed when he told them that God would send a mighty flood that would cover the earth and drown all the people of the world. There was no sign of a flood, they said, and they did not believe any flood was coming. What a fool he was to toil all day and wear himself out with work, instead of taking his ease and enjoying his pleasures.

But Noah worked on. And as the years passed by, the ark at last was finished, and Noah went in with his wife and family and two of each of the birds and beasts and insects which God had promised to save. Then the sky grew black with clouds, and a terrible rain began to pour down. Blacker and blacker grew the sky, and fiercer and fiercer blew the wind, and the rain came down in such torrents that the rivers began to swell and overflow their banks, and presently the whole world was just one great sea of tossing grey waters.

But God remembered His promise, and the ark floated safely on that tossing sea. For many long days the storm raged, and then at last the rain stopped, and the flood began to subside. Noah waited patiently still for a while, and then opened one of the windows of the ark, and sent out a raven and a dove to see if they would find anything to rest upon. But the dove came

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back with tired wings, and Noah knew that there was no dry ground yet showing above the water. So he waited for another seven days, and again sent the dove out; and this time she came back with a tiny green olive leaf in her beak. And the third time he sent her out she did not return at all.

The waters were slowly going down; the earth, all fresh and clean, began to show itself once more, and the green things were all beginning to grow again. Then God bade Noah open the ark and set all the animals free upon the green earth once more.

So Noah came out with his wife and all his family, and he built an altar to God, and sacrificed upon it the best of everything in a great thanksgiving service.

Then God blessed Noah, and promised that never again would He send another flood to destroy the world. And as Noah listened to God's voice, he looked up, and saw in the sky a beautiful half-circle of shining light made up of all the fairest colours, its ends touching the earth, and its circle stretching across the sky.

It was the sign of God's promise, the rainbow of hope, which should always bring to us its message telling of sunshine after rain, joy after sorrow.



“And, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off.”

Genesis viii. 11

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

IN those long ago days, when the story of the world was only beginning, a city had grown up, far away in the East, on the banks of the great river Euphrates. The people who settled there had learned to make bricks and build houses; but many of them still lived in tents, for they often wandered far away from their city, and lived among the fields, where they were herding their sheep and cattle.

There were no books in those days to teach the people what they wanted to know; but they learned from other things besides books, and the great sky above them was a page they often studied. They watched the golden sun rise in the east, and marked the hours as it climbed high into the sky, and it taught them all about times and seasons; and at night, when they saw the moon hang out her silver lamp, and the stars come out one by one, they learned the lesson of numbers, and how to guide their way, and many other things.

It was amongst these people that Abraham had been born—Abraham the great traveller, the man who had journeyed far away into unknown lands, and who had met with so many adventures. He had returned now from his wanderings, and returned a very rich

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

man indeed. His possessions were piled high on the backs of the long string of camels and asses; his flocks of sheep and goats and herds of cattle were driven along by hundreds of his servants; and he, the great chief, in his scarlet robe rode at their head.

A whole country was needed for this large tribe of people, with their flocks and herds; so Abraham halted on the wide plain of Mamre, and settled down there to make his home.

It seemed as if the chief had all that his heart could desire: there was his dear wife, Sarah, to keep him company; there was his gold and silver, his sheep and cattle, a beautiful land to dwell in, and, best of all, he had God for his friend.

But there was just one thing that Abraham and his wife had not got, and they wanted that one thing more than anything else in the world. They had no children, and they longed with all their hearts for a little son. God had been so good to them, had taken care of them through all their wanderings, had given them great riches; but this one gift He had not sent, and they said to themselves, "What is the use of all our possessions when we have no son to enjoy them after we are gone?"

Now it happened one day that Abraham sat at the door of his tent, and looked out over the rich fields where his flocks were feeding, finding very little pleasure in it all, and feeling, perhaps, rather sorrowful and lonely, when suddenly there came to him three wonderful men whom he knew were messengers from



Abraham leaving Home

THE STORY OF ABRAHAM

God. And the message they brought was a very joyful one—so joyful that Sarah, who was listening inside the tent, could scarcely believe it could be true. God was going to give them a little son, the messenger angels said.

But although Sarah thought the news was too good to be true, Abraham was quite sure that God would do as He promised; and he was quite right, for, after waiting all those many, many years, the baby whom they had so longed for was born.

There was surely no happier woman in all the world than Sarah when she held her little son in her arms, and Abraham's happiness was as great as hers. They called the baby Isaac, which means "laughter," and he was the very joy of their hearts; and as he grew into a strong, healthy boy, they seemed to love him more every day. He was their only child, and so much more precious than all the other gifts that God had given them.

Now God knew that Abraham loved and trusted Him, and He knew, too, how much Abraham loved his little son, and so He made a plan to try which love was the greater.

In the stillness one day God's voice called, "Abraham!"

And Abraham answered at once, "Behold, here am I."

Then, quite plain and clear, the command came, "Take now thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou

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lovest, and offer him for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.”

Abraham knew just what that meant, for he had often built an altar of stones and offered a lamb upon it to God; but now, instead of a lamb, he was to give his only son.

Not for one moment did Abraham hesitate. He could not understand why God should want to take back His precious gift, but he trusted God with all his heart, and was sure that whatever He did must be right.

Very early in the morning he prepared for the journey to those distant mountains which he could just see on the horizon. He saddled the ass, and told Isaac to get ready to go on a journey with him, and he also carefully cut the wood ready for the burnt offering.

Isaac was quite a big boy by this time, and was accustomed to go on journeys with his father; so he asked no questions about what they were going to do until at last they reached the mountain and began to climb up over the rocks. His father had given him the bundle of wood to carry, and he saw, too, the knife and the fire, so he was sure they were going to offer a sacrifice to God. But where was the lamb? What was the use of fire and wood without the lamb? Isaac was puzzled, and at last he felt that he must ask a question.

“My father,” he said.

And the poor father, climbing up and up with



“They went both of them together.”

Genesis xxii. 6.

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tired feet and a heart heavy with sorrow, paused for a moment, and answered, "Here am I, my son."

"Behold the fire and the wood," said Isaac, "but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?"

"My son," answered Abraham, "God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

So on and on they went, until at last they came to the place which God had chosen; and there Abraham built an altar, and put everything ready, and took his son, whom he loved so dearly, and who was so willing to do as his father bade him, and put him also upon the altar. Now he took the knife, and raised it up to kill the boy; but before he had time to strike, God's voice rang out from heaven.

"Abraham, Abraham, lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him, for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

So Isaac was saved, and all Abraham's sorrow was turned into joy. He had trusted in God through the darkness of sorrow, when every step of that long journey had cost him bitter suffering; and now in the sunshine of joy he retraced his steps, with a heart so full of gratitude and happiness that the long journey seemed to him as a pathway of flowers, the boy's hand clasped in his, and God leading them.