

A Sermon in Sand



Ed. C. Gottry

A SERMON IN SAND

*"Judge not the working of the brain
And the heart thou canst not see.
What looks to thy dim eyes a stain,
In God's pure light may only be
A scar—brought from some well won field—
Where thou wouldst only faint and yield."*

—Proctor

The Master sat by the roadside,
Far away from the town and its din;
And the Pharisees brought for judgment,
A woman o'ertaken in sin.
A woman whose name had been tarnished,
And blackened by tongue and by pen;
Whose every mistake had been published
By a rabble of self-righteous men.

And they told of her life full of errors,
With many an "I've heard" and "they say,"
But she stood mute, nor ever made answer,
Nor turned from the Master away.
She stood thus accused, sad and friendless,
With no one to take her part,
And rested her case with the jurist
Who judges the human heart.

The Master sat listening in silence
To each charge by the rabble bold;
And the law laid down by the lawyers,
With precedent hoary and old:
But He spake never a word, nor a sentence,
As He gazed on the throng pressing round—
He alone knows every life-story—
And He stooped and wrote on the ground.

He wrote in the sand of the dessert,
That no record might ever be made,
That no other eyes might behold the lines,
Nor tongue repeat what He said.
And the shifting sands of the dessert,
As they tossed in the playful wind,
Wiped out the words that the Master wrote,
And left no record behind.

He wrote not on parchment nor paper;
 He wrote not with pencil nor pen;
His words were for the time and the moment;
 For a woman and self-righteous men.
But the moral will live through the ages,
 And forever as pattern will stand:
Teaching mortals to judge kindly of others
 And write of their errors in sand.

We know naught of what was then written,
 For the writing passed with the day;
But the indictment penned by the Master
 Caused the accusers to steal away.
Perchance, 'twas a tale of men's honor;
 Perchance, of their crime and their shame,
In which each self-righteous accuser
 Saw written his own guilty name.

Or again, perchance, of the woman;
 Of her life and her friendless lot;
Of the temptations spread out before her;
 Of the many hard battles she'd fought.
We know not one word that was written,
 But here is a thought that's grand:
That the Master wrote with His finger,
 And wrote in the shifting sand.

The sland'rous word, like an arrow,
 Goes forth on an out-going track;
And the calumny, once it is spoken,
 Will never, no never, come back.
Then, let's carve others' virtues in granite—
 In rocks—that forever shall stand;
But if we know aught of their errors,
 Write these in the shifting sand.

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