



A Short Story Devotion of James Baldwin

SHE stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. 21 She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. 22 She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. 23 Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land. 24 She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. 25 Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. 26 She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. 27 She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. 28 Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. 29 Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. 30 Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. 31 Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates. (Prov 31:20-31)

This story, Cornelia's Jewels, is written by James Baldwin, a prolific writer, author, and publisher of elementary school books and books for children. Below is a brief biographical sketch:

About the Author

Born in 1841 in a small Quaker settlement in the backwoods of Indiana, James Baldwin rose to become a highly-respected author and textbook editor. Largely self-educated, Baldwin became a teacher at 24, then served as superintendent of the graded schools of

Indiana for 18 years before moving into the publishing world. As an editor of school books, first with Harper and Brothers and later with the American Book Company, he selected the best of our literary heritage and cast it into a form that delighted children of all ages. His influence in the first decades of the twentieth century was broad because of all the grammar school books in use in the United States at that time over half had been written or edited by him. He is remembered most for the books of introductory historical sketches he wrote for younger students and his retellings of the legends of the heroes for older students.

CORNELIA'S JEWELS

It was a bright morning in the old city of Rome many hundred years ago. In a vine-covered summer-house in a beautiful garden, two boys were standing. They were looking at their mother and her friend, who were walking among the flowers and trees.

"Did you ever see so handsome a lady as our mother's friend?" asked the younger boy, holding his tall brother's hand. "She looks like a queen."

"Yet she is not so beautiful as our mother," said the elder boy. "She has a fine dress, it is true; but her face is not noble and kind. It is our mother who is like a queen."

"That is true," said the other. "There is no woman in Rome so much like a queen as our own dear mother."

Soon Cornelia, their mother, came down the walk to speak with them. She was simply dressed in a plain white robe. Her arms and feet were bare, as was the custom in those days; and no rings nor chains glittered about her hands and neck. For her only crown, long braids of soft brown hair were coiled about her head; and a tender smile lit up her noble face as she looked into her sons' proud eyes.

"Boys," she said, "I have something to tell you."

They bowed before her, as Roman lads were taught to do, and said, "What is it, mother?"

"You are to dine with us to-day, here in the garden; and then our friend is going to show us that wonderful casket of jewels of which you have heard so much."

The brothers looked shyly at their mother's friend. Was it possible that she had still other rings besides those on her fingers? Could she have other gems besides those which sparkled in the chains about her neck?

When the simple out-door meal was over, a servant brought the casket from the house. The lady opened it. Ah, how those jewels dazzled the eyes of the wondering boys! There were ropes of pearls, white as milk, and smooth as satin; heaps of shining rubies, red as the glowing coals; sapphires as blue as the sky that summer day; and diamonds that flashed and sparkled like the sunlight.

The brothers looked long at the gems.

"Ah!" whispered the younger; "if our mother could only have such beautiful things!"

At last, how-ever, the casket was closed and carried carefully away.

"Is it true, Cornelia, that you have no jewels?" asked her friend. "Is it true, as I have heard it whispered, that you are poor?"

"No, I am not poor," answered Cornelia, and as she spoke she drew her two boys to her side; "for here are my jewels. They are worth more than all your gems."

I am sure that the boys never forgot their mother's pride and love and care; and in after years, when they had become great men in Rome, they often thought of this scene in the garden. And the world still likes to hear the story of Cornelia's jewels.

NOTE: I reformatted the type from Baldwin's original 'pronunciation' helps for child readers. I do not remember reading a single story in my elementary readers whose intent was not to lift our visions above our childish horizons promote good manners and character. Were it so today, perhaps our young people would be aspiring to higher callings than drugs, promiscuous sex, and greed. James Baldwin died in 1925. (Bishop Jerry Ogles)