

Rex and Zendah
in



THE LAND
OF THE
VIRGIN

THE ENTRANCE to the next land was through an archway, the pillars of which were almost entirely covered with sheaves of corn, held in place by twisted bands of leaves, among which were twined branches of fruit and flowers.

It reminded them of the harvest festival.

At the base of each of the pillars was a bowl of water, and round each of these were engraved words.

On one: "Only with clean hands and feet can ye enter this land." On the other: "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."

The space between the pillars had no gate, but seemed to be filled with corn, growing higher than the children's heads.

There was no path to be seen, and when they touched the corn with their hands, it was stiff and unbending, and there was no way through.

Zendah looked at the scroll of Hermes and pointed out to Rex what it said: "When you arrive at the Land of the Virgin, wash in the water of the basins and empty it in front of the growing corn; then pronounce the Password."

They went to the basins and began to wash their hands, Rex taking one and Zendah the other. "Do you think we must both wash in each of them?" asked Rex.

"Of course, silly," said Zendah, "I expect they are different kinds of water; I am sure they felt dif-

ferent to me, when I put my hands in." Then sitting down on the ground she put her feet into the waters of both bowls.

"I don't see any need to do that," grumbled Rex, who thought they were wasting time by so much washing. But when Zendah pointed out that the motto on one of the bowls did say something about feet, he thought it was better to do the same. Having finished, they threw out the water as directed, when these words formed in the sand at their feet:

"Purity is Service."

The words slowly formed and disappeared. A voice startled them. "Welcome children, at last."

They looked up, and there, parting with both hands what had seemed to be stiff, unbending corn, was Hermes.

"You have managed very well without me up to now," he said, "but I have never been very far away, though you did not notice me. It was I who whispered in your ears when you did not know quite what to do."

He beckoned them to him, and parting the corn with one hand, he pointed with the other to a path leading through it. On they went, through miles and miles of corn fields, oats and barley, wheat and maize, and many other kinds of grain. They were all ripe and waiting to be gathered. At the far end of the path they came out into open and pleasant country, and there they were met by



several women dressed in yellow robes, somewhat resembling the colour of the corn.

These women did not seem to see Hermes, but spoke to the children at once.

“Have you washed your feet?” asked one.

“Are your hands clean?” demanded another.

“I hope you have not brought the least speck of dirt into the Land of the Virgin,” said a third.

Rex and Zendah were puzzled and looked at Hermes to know what to say.

“Ladies,” he said, “there is no need for your questions, which are quite right for most people, but these children are using their star bodies, and as you know those are always clean, yet they could not have entered this land unless they had used the water in the bowls at the gate.”

The women solemnly bowed to the children who went on with Hermes, walking through the sunlit country. Everywhere were little houses standing in their own neat little gardens, every one just a little different from the others.

One thing these gardens had in common—there was not a weed to be seen anywhere, and in each one there were formal beds of flowers and tidy paths with not a stone out of place. It was all so spick and span that they were almost afraid to walk along the roads.

Passing at last away from these country places, they came to the capital of the country which Hermes told them was called the Town of Perfection.

Here were fine clean buildings that seemed to be mostly offices for doing different kinds of business. Inside they found clerks, busily writing in enormous ledgers, adding up sums with rows and rows of figures.

Every wall was covered with shelves divided into hundreds of pigeon holes, filled with papers, and all labeled with different names. People were running to and from these holes either putting some papers away, or fetching some out. They were very busy, too busy to explain anything to the children, who did not feel very much interested until Hermes told them that the writing which was



done there was very useful to the other lands, because this recorded and kept safe the important things that happened.

Then they went down to a large room below the offices where they became greatly interested. It was the largest laboratory that they had ever seen. Men and women in long white coats, helped by a number of quite small boys about the age of Rex, were grouped round small, blue gas flames watching queer-shaped glass tubes.

Some were pounding things with pestles in mortars. Every now and then there would be an explosion in one of the tubes, and all would gather round and make notes in their own little notebooks. One man was squeezing juice out of various fruits, filling glass tubes with it, and trying the effect of drops of different colored liquids on the juice. This result too was noted in a book.

“What are they doing?” asked Rex.

“They are trying to find out which things are the most valuable foods for people to eat.”

Rex pulled a face. "I think the best foods are those that taste the best."

Hermes laughed. "I am afraid they do not all think so in this land."

From there they passed through a doorway into a greenhouse filled with plants and flowers in full bloom, many of which were quite strange to them.

"Why!" said Zendah, after she had run first from one queer plant to another, "they are not a bit like our flowers at home." The head gardener came up just then, and replied:

"No, of course not, this is where the fairies help us to grow new kinds of fruit and flowers. See, this is how we do it—but first I must see if the stars say it is the right time." And he went to a book that was hanging in a corner of the greenhouse, and ran his finger down a page. "Yes, in five minutes we may begin." So from a box he took a small brush, and going to a white lily-like plant that was growing near them, he took some of the yellow pollen from its stamens, and then passing to a gorgeous red flower, he placed the pollen on the long green rod that grew in the centre of the flower.

"Now," he said, "we must tie it up in a muslin bag so that nothing else can touch it, and when the seeds ripen, we shall be able to grow a beautiful lily, red with white spots, or it may be white with red spots, I cannot say which, for that all depends on the fairies."

Then he gave them a peach with a pineapple flavor and an apple with no core nor seeds, that had a musk flavor.

He showed them a blue rose and a bright yellow sweet pea. "All these flowers and fruits are discovered here first before you can grow them down on Earth," he said.

Zendah caught hold of his arm, "When shall we

be able to grow a blue rose?" she said. He shook his head mysteriously: "When the Head Gardener comes to live with you," he replied.

They could hardly drag themselves away, but at last Hermes said they must hurry on, and took them into a garden enclosed by high stone walls. Each wall was covered with fruit trees, and in the middle was a six-sided bed filled with white Madonna lilies. In the centre was a most unusual fruit tree; the leaves shone, silver-like, and the fruit sparkled like Jewels with different colors. Right on the topmost branch was a golden apple that shone as the Sun.

"That is the most valuable thing in this land," said Hermes, "the Golden Apple of Knowledge and Healing. There is only one at present in the whole universe. Some of those people you just saw are trying to make other fruit trees grow one like it. They have succeeded in growing a silver one that will do a great deal of good, but they have not found out how to grow the real apple yet."

From this courtyard, they entered the palace. Here, as everywhere else, everything was exactly where it should be—nor could you find a fault with anything; but still, it was not as beautiful nor as comforting as the Palace of Venus.

All the walls were covered with white and yellow linen hangings with little streams of water running in channels down every passage, so that you had to step through water to enter any room. This prevented your taking dust into any of the rooms. In the largest hall, at the far end, there was a dais upon which were seated five wise-looking young men at a round table.

The chair at the head of the table was vacant; the only real difference between it and the others being



that it was more beautifully carved. Hermes told them that was his chair, but he was so busy as the messenger of the gods, that these five men governed for him when he had to be away.

“Then too, my brother Vulcan helps, but he is so occupied at his forge making beautiful works of art that he has not much time for ruling either, and many people do not know when he is here.”

They just peeped into a workshop at the side of the hall and saw Vulcan hammering out sheets of metal. Numbers of young people were making all kinds of useful things, from vases and bowls to tiny buckets. The most noticeable thing was the fineness of the details, and the polish they imparted to each article.

Back once again in the large hall, Hermes took a beautifully colored apple from a plate and gave it to Zendah. Looking at it with surprise, she found it was made of metal, though it looked so real.



“This is only a copy of the real apple of health,” he said, “but even this will take away headaches when you smell it, and cure quite a number of other things too.”

Into Rex’s hand he dropped a lily-shaped pin, with the head made of jasper, telling him to keep this as a remembrance of the Land of the Virgin.

From another dish he took a large flat cake, and breaking it in half he gave them each a piece. “Nowhere will you find such satisfying bread as that from the Land of Purity,” he said.

Indeed, after they had tasted it Rex and Zendah thought they had never had such delicious bread before.

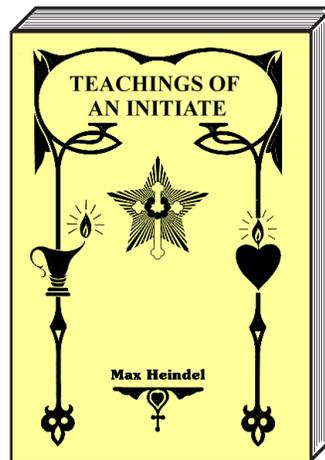
Returning from the hall toward the entrance gate, they passed all the neat little houses, and once more came to the corn fields.

Hermes showed them the path and waved his hand; they walked through and soon found themselves outside the Land of the Virgin, and close to the next gate. (Continued) □

—Esme Swainson

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