EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE DEUTERONOMY JOSHUA JUDGES RUTH AND FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL SECOND SAMUEL FIRST KINGS AND SECOND KINGS CHAPTERS 1 TO 7

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, AND FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

SECOND SAMUEL, FIRST KINGS, AND SECOND KINGS CHAPTERS I to VII

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DEUTERONOMY, JOSHUA, JUDGES, RUTH, AND FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

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THE BOOK OF DEUTERONOMY

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GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Know therefore that the Lord thy God, He is God, the faithful God,

which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him.'--DEUT. vii.

9.

Faithful,' like most Hebrew words, has a picture in it. It means

something that can be (1) leant on, or (2) builded on.

This leads to a double signification--(1) trustworthy, and that because

(2) rigidly observant of obligations. So the word applies to a steward,

a friend, or a witness. Its most wonderful and sublime application is

to God. It presents to our adoring love--

I. God as coming under obligations to us.

A marvellous and blessed idea. He limits His action, regards Himself as

bound to a certain line of conduct.

1. Obligations from His act of creation.

A faithful Creator,' bound to take care of those whom He has made. To

supply their necessities. To satisfy their desires. To give to each the

possibility of discharging its ideal.

2. Obligations from His past self.

God is faithful by whom ye were called,' therefore He will do all that

is imposed on Him by His act of calling.

He cannot begin without completing. There are no abandoned mines. There

are no half-hewn stones in His quarries, like the block at Baalbec. And

this because the divine nature is inexhaustible in power and

unchangeable in purpose.

3. Obligations from His own word.

A revelation is presupposed by the notion of faithfulness. It is not

possible in heathenism. Dumb idols,' which have given their worshippers

no promises, cannot be thought of as faithful. By its grand conception

of Jehovah as entering into a covenant with Israel, the Old Testament

presents Him to our trust as having bound Himself to a known line of

action. Thereby He becomes, if we may so phrase it, a constitutional

monarch.

That conception of a Covenant is the negation of caprice, of arbitrary

sovereignty, of mystery. We know the principles of His government. His

majestic I wills' cover the whole ground of human life and needs for

the present and the future. We can go into no region of life but we

find that God has defined His conduct to us there by some word spoken

to our heart and binding Him.

4. Obligations from His new Covenant and highest word in Jesus Christ.

He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.'

II. God as recognising and discharging these obligations.

That He will do so comes from His very nature. With Him there is no

change of disposition, no emergence of unseen circumstances, no failure

or exhaustion of power.

That He does so is matter of fact. Moses in the preceding context had

pointed to facts of history, on which he built the know therefore' of

the text. On the broad scale the whole world's history is full of

illustrations of God's faithfulness to His promises and His threats.

The history of Judaism, the sorrows of nations, and the complications

of national events, all illustrate this fact.

The personal history of each of us. The experience of all Christian

souls. No man ever trusted in Him and was ashamed. He wills that we

should put Him to the proof.

III. God as claiming our trust.

He is faithful, worthy to be trusted, as His deeds show.

Faith is our attitude corresponding to His faithfulness. Faith is the

germ of all that He requires from us. How much we need it! How firm it

might be! How blessed it would make us!

The thought of God as faithful' is, like a precious stone, turned in

many directions in Scripture, and wherever turned it flashes light.

Sometimes it is laid as the foundation for the confidence that even our

weakness will be upheld to the end, as when Paul tells the Corinthians

that they will be confirmed to the end, because God is faithful,

through whom ye were called into the fellowship of His Son' (1 Cor. i.

9). Sometimes there is built on it the assurance of complete

sanctification, as when he prays for the Thessalonians that their whole

spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of

our Lord' and finds it in his heart to pray thus because Faithful is He

that calleth you, who will also do it' (1 Thess. v. 24). Sometimes it

is presented as the steadfast stay grasping which faith can expect

apparent impossibilities, as when Sara judged Him faithful who had

promised' (Heb. xi. 11). Sometimes it is adduced as bringing strong

consolation to souls conscious of their own feeble and fluctuating

faith, as when Paul tells Timothy that If we are faithless, He abideth

faithful; for He cannot deny Himself' (2 Tim. ii. 13). Sometimes it is

presented as an anodyne to souls disturbed by experience of men's

unreliableness, as when the apostle heartens the Thessalonians and

himself to bear human untrustworthiness by the thought that though men

are faithless, God is faithful, who shall establish you and keep you

from evil' (2 Thess. iii. 2, 3). Sometimes it is put forward to breathe

patience into tempted spirits, as when the Corinthians are comforted by

the assurance that God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be

tempted above that ye are able' (1 Cor. x. 13). Sometimes it is laid as

the firm foundation for our assurance of pardon, as when John tells us

that If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our

sins' (1 John i. 9). And sometimes that great attribute of the divine

nature is proposed as holding forth a pattern for us to follow, and the

faith in it as tending to make us in a measure steadfast like Himself,

as when Paul indignantly rebuts his enemies' charge of levity of

purpose and vacillation, and avers that as God is faithful, our word

toward you is not yea and nay' (2 Cor. i. 18).

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THE LESSON OF MEMORY

Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these

lofty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to

know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His

commandments, or no.'--DEUT. viii. 2.

The strand of our lives usually slips away smoothly enough, but days

such as this, the last Sunday in a year, are like the knots on a

sailor's log, which, as they pass through his fingers, tell him how

fast it is being paid out from the reel, and how far it has run off.

They suggest a momentary consciousness of the swift passage of life,

and naturally lead us to a glance backwards and forwards, both of which

occupations ought to be very good for us. The dead flat upon which some

of us live may be taken as an emblem of the low present in which most

of us are content to pass our lives, affording nowhere a distant view,

and never enabling us to see more than a street's length ahead of us.

It is a good thing to get up upon some little elevation and take a

wider view, backwards and forwards.

And so now I venture to let the season preach to us, and to confine

myself simply to suggesting for you one or two very plain and obvious

thoughts which may help to make our retrospect wise and useful. And

there are two main considerations which I wish to submit. The first is

--what we ought to be chiefly occupied with as we look back; and

secondly, what the issue of such a retrospect ought to be.

I. With what we should be mainly occupied as we look back. Memory, like

all other faculties, may either help us or hinder us. As is the man, so

will be his remembrance. The tastes which rule his present will

determine the things that he likes best to think about in the past.

There are many ways of going wrong in our retrospects. Some of us, for

instance, prefer to think with pleasure about things that ought never

to have been done, and to give a wicked immortality to thoughts that

ought never to have had a being. Some men's tastes and inclinations are

so vitiated and corrupted that they find a joy in living their

badnesses over again. Some of us, looking back on the days that are

gone, select by instinctive preference for remembrance, the vanities

and frivolities and trifles which were the main things in them whilst

they lasted. Such a use of the great faculty of memory is like the

folly of the Egyptians who embalmed cats and vermin. Do not let us be

of those, who have in their memories nothing but rubbish, or something

worse, who let down the drag-net into the depths of the past and bring

it up full only of mud and foulnesses, and of ugly monsters that never

ought to have been dragged into the daylight.

Then there are some of us who abuse memory just as much by picking out,

with perverse ingenuity, every black bit that lies in the distance

behind us, all the disappointments, all the losses, all the pains, all

the sorrows. Some men look back and say, with Jacob in one of his

moods, Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life!' Yes!

and the same man, when he was in a better spirit, said, and a great

deal more truly, The God that fed me all my life long, the Angel which

redeemed me from all evil.' Do not paint like Rembrandt, even if you do

not paint like Turner. Do not dip your brush only in the blackness,

even if you cannot always dip it in molten sunshine.

And there are some of us who, in like manner, spoil all the good that

we could get out of a wise retrospect, by only looking back in such a

fashion as to feed a sentimental melancholy, which is, perhaps, the

most profitless of all the ways of looking backwards.

Now here are the two points, in this verse of my text, which would put

all these blunders and all others right, telling us what we should

chiefly think about when we look back, and from what point of view the

retrospect of the past must be taken in order that it should be

salutary. Thou shalt remember all the way by which the Lord thy God

hath led thee.' Let memory work under the distinct recognition of

divine guidance in every part of the past. That is the first condition

of making the retrospect blessed. To humble thee and to prove thee, and

to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His

commandments, or no'; let us look back with a clear recognition of the

fact that the use of life is to test, and reveal, and to make,

character. This world, and all its outward engagements, duties, and

occupations, is but a scaffolding, on which the builders may stand to

rear the true temple, and when the building is reared you may do what

you like with the scaffolding. So we have to look back on life from

this point of view, that its joys and sorrows, its ups and downs, its

work and repose, the vicissitudes and sometimes contrariety of its

circumstances and conditions, are all for the purpose of making us, and

of making plain to ourselves, what we are. To humble thee,' that is, to

knock the self-confidence out of us, and to bring us to say: I am

nothing and Thou art everything; I myself am a poor weak rag of a

creature that needs Thy hand to stiffen me, or I shall not be able to

resist or to do.' That is one main lesson that life is meant to teach

us. Whoever has learnt to say by reason of the battering and shocks of

time, by reason of sorrows and failures, by reason of joys, too, and

fruition,--Lord, I come to Thee as depending upon Thee for everything,'

has wrung its supreme good out of life, and has fulfilled the purpose

of the Father, who has led us all these years, to humble us into the

wholesome diffidence that says: Not in myself, but in Thee are all my

strength and my hope.'

I need not do more than remind you of the other cognate purposes which

are suggested here. Life is meant, not only to bring us to humble

self-distrust, as a step towards devout dependence on God, but also to

reveal us to ourselves; for we only know what we are by reflecting on

what we have done, and the only path by which self-knowledge can be

attained is the path of observant recollection of our conduct in daily

life.

Another purpose for which the whole panorama of life is made to pass

before us, and for which all the gymnastic of life exercises us, is

that we may be made submissive to the great Will, and may keep His

commandments.

These thoughts should be with us in our retrospect, and then our

retrospect will be blessed: First, we are to look back and see God's

guidance everywhere, and second, we are to judge of the things that we

remember by their tendency to make character, to make us humble, to

reveal us to ourselves, and to knit us in glad obedience to our Father

God.

II. And now turn to the other consideration which may help to make

remembrance a good, viz., the issues to which our retrospect must tend,

if it is to be anything more than sentimental recollection.

First, let me say: Remember and be thankful. If what I have been saying

as to the standard by which events are to be tried be true; if it be

the case that the main fact about things is their power to mould

persons and to make character, then there follows, very plainly and

clearly, that all things that come within the sweep of our memory may

equally contribute to our highest good.

Good does not mean pleasure. Bright-being may not always be well-being,

and the highest good has a very much nobler meaning than comfort and

satisfaction. And so, realising the fact that the best of things is

that they shall make us like God, then we can turn to the past and

judge it wisely, because then we shall see that all the diversity, and

even the opposition, of circumstances and events, may co-operate

towards the same end. Suppose two wheels in a great machine, one turns

from right to left and the other from left to right, but they fit into

one another, and they both produce one final result of motion. So the

moments in my life which I call blessings and gladness, and the moments

in my life which I call sorrows and tortures, may work into each other,

and they will do so if I take hold of them rightly, and use them as

they ought to be used. They will tend to the highest good whether they

be light or dark; even as night with its darkness and its dews has its

ministration and mission of mercy for the wearied eye no less than day

with its brilliancy and sunshine; even as the summer and the winter are

equally needful, and equally good for the crop. So in our lives it is

good for us, sometimes, that we be brought into the dark places; it is

good for us sometimes that the leaves be stripped from the trees, and

the ground be bound with frost.

And so for both kinds of weather, dear brethren, we have to remember

and be thankful. It is a hard lesson, I know, for some of us. There may

be some listening to me whose memory goes back to this dying year as

the year that has held the sorest sorrow of their lives; to whom it has

brought some loss that has made earth dark. And it seems hard to tell

quivering lips to be thankful, and to bid a man be grateful though his

eyes fill with tears as he looks back on such a past. But yet it is

true that it is good for us to be drawn, or to be driven, to Him; it is

good for us to have to tread even a lonely path if it makes us lean

more on the arm of our Beloved. It is good for us to have places made

empty if, as in the year when Israel's King died, we shall thereby have

our eyes purged to behold the Lord sitting on the Royal Seat.

Take it on trust a little while,

Thou soon shalt read the mystery right,

In the full sunshine of His smile.'

And for the present let us try to remember that He dwelleth in the

darkness as in the light, and that we are to be thankful for the things

that help us to be near Him, and not only for the things that make us

outwardly glad. So I venture to say even to those of you who may be

struggling with sad remembrances, remember and be thankful.

I have no doubt there are many of us who have to look back, if not upon

a year desolated by some blow that never can be repaired, yet upon a

year in which failing resources and declining business, or diminished

health, or broken spirits, or a multitude of minute but most disturbing

cares and sorrows, do make it hard to recognise the loving Hand in all

that comes. Yet to such, too, I would say: All things work together for

good,' therefore all things are to be embraced in the thankfulness of

our retrospect.

The second and simple practical suggestion that I make is this:

Remember, and let the memory lead to contrition. Perhaps I am speaking

to some men or women for whom this dying year holds the memory of some

great lapse from goodness; some young man who for the first time has

been tempted to sensuous sin; some man who may have been led into

slippery places in regard to business integrity. I draw a bow at a

venture' when I speak of such things--perhaps some one is listening to

me who would give a great deal if he or she could forget a certain past

moment of this dying year, which makes their cheeks hot yet whilst they

think of it. To such I say: Remember, go close into the presence of the

black thing, and get the consciousness of it driven into your heart;

for such remembrance is the first step to deliverance from the load,

and to your passing, emancipated from the bitterness, into the year

that lies before you.

But even if there are none of us to whom such remarks would specially

apply, let us summon up to ourselves the memories of these bygone days.

In all the three hundred and sixty-five of them, my friend, how many

moments stand out distinct before you as moments of high communion with

God? How many times can you remember of devout consecration to Him? How

many, when--as visitors to the Riviera reckon the number of days in the

season in which, far across the water, they have seen Corsica--you can

remember this year to have beheld, faint and far away, the mountains

that are round about' the Jerusalem that is above'? How many moments do

you remember of consecration and service, of devotion to your God and

your fellows? Oh! what a miserable, low-lying stretch of God-forgetting

monotony our lives look when we are looking back at them in the mass.

One film of mist is scarcely perceptible, but when you get a mile of it

you can tell what it is--oppressive darkness. One drop of muddy water

does not show its pollution, but when you have a pitcherful of it you

can see how thick it is. And so a day or an hour looked back upon may

not reveal the true godlessness of the average life, but if you will

take the twelvemonth and think about it, and ask yourself a question or

two about it, I think you will feel that the only attitude for any of

us in looking back across a stretch of such brown barren moorland is

that of penitent prayer for forgiveness and for cleansing.

But I dare say that some of you say: Oh! I look back and I do not feel

anything of that kind of regret that you describe; I have done my duty,

and nobody can blame me. I am quite comfortable in my retrospect. Of

course there have been imperfections; we are all human, and these need

not trouble a man.' Let me ask you, dear brother, one question: Do you

believe that the law of a man's life is, Thou shalt love the Lord thy

God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy

strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself'? Do you

believe that that is what you ought to do? Have you done it? If you

have not, let me beseech you not to go out of this year, across the

artificial and imaginary boundary that separates you from the next,

with the old guilt upon your back, but go to Jesus Christ, and ask Him

to forgive you, and then you may pass into the coming twelvemonth

without the intolerable burden of unremembered, unconfessed, and

therefore unforgiven, sin.

The next point that I would suggest is this: Let us remember in order

that from the retrospect we may gain practical wisdom. It is

astonishing what unteachable, untamable creatures men are. They learn

wisdom about all the little matters of daily life by experience, but

they do not seem to do so about the higher. Even a sparrow comes to

understand a scarecrow after a time or two, and any rat in a hole will

learn the trick of a trap. But you can trick men over and over again

with the same inducement, and, even whilst the hook is sticking in

their jaws, the same bait will tempt them once more. That is very

largely the case because they do not observe and remember what has

happened to them in bygone days.

There are two things that any man, who will bring his reason and

common-sense to bear upon the honest estimate and retrospect of the

facts of his life, may be fully convinced of. These are, first, his own

weakness. One main use of a wise retrospect is to teach us where we are

weakest. What an absurd thing it would be if the inhabitants of a Dutch

village were to let the sea come in at the same gap in the same dyke a

dozen times! What an absurd thing it would be if a city were captured

over and over again by assaults at the same point, and did not

strengthen its defences there! But that is exactly what you do; and all

the while, if you would only think about your own past lives wisely and

reasonably, and like men with brains in your heads, you might find out

where it was that you were most open to attack; what it was in your

character that most needed strengthening, what it was wherein the devil

caught you most quickly, and might so build yourselves up in the most

defenceless points.

Do not look back for sentimental melancholy; do not look back with

unavailing regrets; do not look back to torment yourselves with useless

self-accusation; but look back to see how good God has been, and look

back to see where you are weak, and pile the wall, higher there, and so

learn practical wisdom from retrospect.

Another phase of the practical wisdom which memory should give is

deliverance from the illusions of sense and time. Remember how little

the world has ever done for you in bygone days. Why should you let it

befool you once again? If it has proved itself a liar when it has

tempted you with gilded offers that came to nothing, and with beauty

that was no more solid than the Easter-eggs' that you buy in the

shops--painted sugar with nothing inside--why should you believe it

when it comes to you once more? Why not say: Ah! once burnt, twice shy!

You have tried that trick on me before, and I have found it out!' Let

the retrospect teach us how hollow life is without God, and so let it

draw us near to Him.

The last thing that I would say is: Let us remember that we may hope.

It is the prerogative of Christian remembrance, that it merges into

Christian hope. The forward look and the backward look are really but

the exercise of the same faculty in two different directions. Memory

does not always imply hope, we remember sometimes because we do not

hope, and try to gather round ourselves the vanished past because we

know it never again can be a present or a future. But when we are

occupied with an unchanging Friend, whose love is inexhaustible, and

whose arm is unwearied, it is good logic to say: It has been, therefore

it shall be.'

With regard to this fleeting life, it is a delusion to say to-morrow

shall be as this day, and much more abundant'; but with regard to the

life of the soul that lives in God, that is true, and true for ever.

The past is a specimen of the future. The future for the man who lives

in Christ is but the prolongation, and the heightening into superlative

excellence and beauty, of all that is good in the past and in the

present. As the radiance of some rising sun may cast its bright beams

into the opposite sky, even so the glowing past behind us flings its

purples and its golds and its scarlets on to the else dim curtain of

the future.

Remember that you may hope. A paradox, but a paradox that is a truth in

the case of Christians whose memory is of a God that has loved and

blessed them whose hope is in a God that changes never; whose memory is

charged with every good and perfect gift that came down from the Father

of Lights,' whose hope is in that same Father, with whom is no

variableness, neither shadow of turning.' So on every stone of

remembrance, every Ebenezer on which is graved: Hitherto hath the Lord

helped us,' we can mount a telescope--if I may so say--that will look

into the furthest glories of the heavens, and be sure that the past

will be magnified and perpetuated in the future. Our prayer may

legitimately be; Thou hast been my help, leave me not, neither forsake

me!' And His answer will be: I will not leave thee until I have done

that which I have spoken to thee of.' Remember that you may hope, and

hope because you remember.

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THE EATING OF THE PEACE-OFFERING

But thou must eat them before the Lord thy God in the place which the

Lord thy God shall choose, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy

manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy

gates: and thou shalt rejoice before the Lord thy God in all that thou

puttest thine hands unto.'--DEUT. xii. 18.

There were three bloody sacrifices, the sin-offering, the

burnt-offering, and the peace-offering. In all three expiation was the

first idea, but in the second of them the act of burning symbolised a

further thought, namely, that of offering to God, while in the third,

the peace-offering, there was added to both of these the still further

thought of the offerer's participation with God, as symbolised by the

eating of the sacrifice. So we have great verities of the most

spiritual religion adumbrated in this external rite. The rind is hard

and forbidding, the kernel is juicy and sweet.

I. Communion with God based on atonement.

II. Feeding on Christ.

What was sacrifice becomes food. The same Person and facts, apprehended

by faith, are, in regard to their bearing on the divine government, the

ground of pardon, and in regard to their operation within us, the

source of spiritual sustenance. Christ for us is our pardon; Christ in

us is our life.

III. The restoration to the offerer of all which he lays on God's

altar.

The sacrifice was transformed and elevated into a sacrament. By being

offered the sacrifice was ennobled. The offerer did not lose what he

laid on the altar, but it came back to him, far more precious than

before. It was no longer mere food for the body, and to eat it became

not an ordinary meal, but a sacrament and means of union with God. It

was a hundredfold more the offerer's even in this life. All its savour

was more savoury, all its nutritive qualities were more nutritious. It

had suffered a fiery change, and was turned into something more rich

and rare.

That is blessedly true as to all which we lay on God's altar. It is far

more ours than it ever was or could be, while we kept it for ourselves,

and our enjoyment of, and nourishment from, our good things, when

offered as sacrifices, are greater than when we eat our morsel alone.

If we make earthly joys and possessions the materials of our sacrifice,

they will not only become more joyful and richer, but they will become

means of closer union with Him, instead of parting us from Him, as they

do when used in selfish disregard of Him.

Nor must we forget the wonderful thought, also mirrored in this piece

of ancient ritual, that God delights in men's sacrifices and surrenders

and services. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee,' said the

Psalmist in God's name in regard to outward sacrifices; Will I eat the

flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?' But he does eat' the

better sacrifices that loving hearts or obedient wills lay on His

altar. He seeks for these, and delights when they are offered to Him.

He hungered, and seeing a fig tree by the wayside, He came to it.' He

still hungers for the fruit that we can yield to Him, and if we will,

He will enter in and sup with us, not disdaining to sit at the poor

table which we can spread for Him, nor to partake of the humble fare

which we can lay upon it, but mending the banquet by what He brings for

our nourishment, and hallowing the hour by His presence.

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PROPHETS AND THE PROPHET

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee,

thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. 10.

There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his

daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an

observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, 11. Or a charmer, or a

consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. 12. For

all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord: and because

of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before

thee. 13. Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God. 14. For these

nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times,

and unto diviners: but as for thee, the Lord thy God hath not suffered

thee so to do. 15. The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet

from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye

shall hearken; 16. According to all that thou desiredst of the Lord thy

God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again

the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any

more, that I die not. 17. And the Lord said unto me, They have well

spoken that which they have spoken. 18. I will raise them up a Prophet

from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His

mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him. 19.

And it shall come to pass that whosoever will not hearken unto My words

which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him. 20. But the

prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in My name, which I have

not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other

gods, even that prophet shall die. 21. And if thou say in thine heart,

How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? 22. When a

prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor

come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the

prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of

him.'--DEUT. xviii. 9-22.

It is evident from the connection in which the promise of a prophet

like unto Moses' is here introduced that it does not refer to Jesus

only; for it is presented as Israel's continuous defence against the

temptation of seeking knowledge of the divine will by the illegitimate

methods of divination, soothsaying, necromancy, and the like, which

were rampant among the inhabitants of the land. A distant hope of a

prophet in the far-off future could afford no motive to shun these

superstitions. We cannot understand this passage unless we recognise

that the direct reference is to the institution of the prophetic order

as the standing means of imparting the reliable knowledge of God's

will, possessing which, Israel had no need to turn to them that peep

and mutter' and bring false oracles from imagined gods. But that

primary reference of the words does not exclude, but rather demands,

their ultimate reference to Him in whom the divine word is perfectly

enshrined, and who is the bright, consummate flower of the prophetic

order, which spake of Him,' not only in its individual predictions, but

by its very existence.

A glance must be given to the exhaustive list of pretenders to

knowledge of the future or to power of shaping it magically, which

occurs in verses 10, 11, and suggests a terrible picture of the burdens

of superstition which weighed on men in these days of ignorance, as the

like burdens do still, wherever Jesus is not known as the one Revealer

of God, and the sole Lord of all things. Of the eight terms employed,

the first three refer to different means of reading the future, the

next two to different means of influencing events, and the last three

to different ways of consulting the dead. The first of these eight

properly refers to drawing lots, but includes other methods; the second

is an obscure word, which is supposed by some to mean a murmurer,' and

may refer rather to the low mutterings of the soothsayer than to the

method of his working; the third is probably a general expression for

an interpreter of omens, especially of those given by the play of

liquid in a cup,' such as Joseph divined' by.

Two names for magicians follow, of which the former seems to mean one

who worked with charms such as African or American Indian medicine men'

use, and the latter, one who binds by incantations, or one who ties

magic knots, which are supposed to have the power of hindering the

designs of the person against whom they are directed. The word employed

means binding,' and maybe used either literally or metaphorically. The

malicious tying of knots in order to work harm is not dead yet in some

backward corners of Britain. Then follow three names for traffickers

with spirits,--those who raise ghosts as did the witch of Endor, those

who have a familiar spirit,' and those who in any way consult the dead.

It is a grim catalogue, bearing witness to the deep-rooted longing in

men to peer into the darkness ahead, and to get some knowledge of the

purposes of the awful unseen Power who rules there. The longing is here

recognised as legitimate, while the methods are branded as bad, and

Israel is warned from them, by being pointed to the merciful divine

institution which meets the longing.

It is clear, from this glance at the context, that the prophet'

promised to Israel must mean the order, not the individual; and it is

interesting to note, first, the relation in which that order is

presented as standing towards all that rabble of diviners and

sorcerers, with their rubbish of charms and muttered spells. It sweeps

them off the field, because it is truly what they pretend to be. God

knows men's longings, and God will meet them so far as meeting them is

for men's good. But the characteristics of the prophet are set in

strong contrast to those of the diviners and magicians, and lift the

order high above all the filth and folly of these others. First, the

prophet is raised up' by God; the individual holder of the office has

his call' and does not prophesy out of his own heart.' The man who

takes this office on himself without such a call is ipso facto branded

as a false prophet. Then he is from the midst of thee, of thy

brethren,'--springing from the people, not an alien, like so many of

these wandering soothsayers, but with the national life throbbing in

his veins, and himself participant of the thoughts and emotions of his

brethren. Then he is to be like unto' Moses,--not in all points, but in

his receiving direct communications from God, and in his authority as

God's messenger. The crowning characteristic, I will put My words into

his mouth, and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him,'

invests his words with divine authority, calls for obedience to them as

the words of God Himself, widens out his sphere far beyond that of

merely foretelling, brings in the moral and religious element which had

no place in the oracles of the soothsayer, and opens up the prospect of

a continuous progressive revelation throughout the ages (all that I

shall command him'). We mutilate the grand idea of the prophet in

Israel if we think of his work as mainly prediction, and we mutilate it

no less if we exclude prediction from it. We mutilate it still more

fatally if we try to account for it on naturalistic principles, and

fail to see in the prophet a man directly conscious of a divine call,

or to hear in his words the solemn accents of the voice of God.

The loftiness and the limitations of the goodly fellowship of the

prophets' alike point onwards to Jesus Christ. In Him, and in Him

alone, the idea of the prophet is fully realised. The imperfect

embodiments of it in the past were prophecies as well as prophets. The

fact that God has spoken unto the fathers by the prophets,' leads us to

expect that He will speak to us in a Son,' and that not by fragments of

His mighty voice, but in one full, eternal, all-embracing and

all-sufficient Word. Every divine idea, which has been imperfectly

manifested in fragmentary and sinful men and in the material creation,

is completely incarnated in Him. He is the King to whom the sins and

the saintlinesses of Israel's kings alike pointed. He is the Priest,

whom Aaron and his sons foreshadowed, who perfectly exercises the

sympathy which they could only feel partially, because they were

compassed with infirmity and self-regard, and who offers the true

sacrifice of efficacy higher than the blood of bulls and goats.' He is

the Prophet, who makes all other means of knowing the divine will

unnecessary, hearing whom we hear the very voice of God speaking in His

gentle words of love, in His authoritative words of command, in His

illuminating words of wisdom, and speaking yet more loudly and

heart-touchingly in the eloquence of deeds no less than divine; who is

not ashamed to call us brethren,' and is bone of our bone and flesh of

our flesh'; who is like, but greater than, the great lawgiver of

Israel, being the Son and Lord of the house' in which Moses was but a

servant. To Him give all the prophets witness,' and the greatest of

them was honoured when, with Moses, Elijah stood on the Mount of

Transfiguration, subordinate and attesting, and then faded away when

the voice proclaimed, This is My beloved Son, hear Him,'--and they saw

no one save Jesus only.'

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A CHOICE OF MASTERS

Because thou servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with

gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; 48. Therefore shalt

thou serve thine enemies . . . in want of all things: and He shall put

a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until He have destroyed thee.'--DEUT.

xxviii. 47, 48.

The history of Israel is a picture on the large scale of what befalls

every man.

A service--we are all born to obedience, to depend on and follow some

person or thing. There is only a choice of services; and he who boasts

himself free is but a more abject slave, as the choice for a nation is

either the rule of settled order and the sanctities of an established

law, or the usurpation of a mob and the intolerable tyranny of

unbridled and irresponsible force.

I. The service of God or the service of our enemies.

Israel was the servant in turn of Egypt, Philistia, Edom, Assyria,

Babylon, Syria, and Rome. It was every invader's prey. God's invisible

arm was its only guard from these, and an all-sufficient guard as long

as it leaned on Him. When it turned from Him it fell under their yoke.

Its lawful Lord loved it; its tyrants hated it.

So with us. We have to serve God or enemies. Our lusts, our passions,

the world, evil habits--in a word, our sins ring us round. God is the

only defence against them.

The contrast between the one and the many--a king or an ochlocracy. The

contrast of the loving Lord and the hostile sins.

II. A service which is honour or a service which is degradation.

God alone is worthy of our absolute submission and service. How low a

man sinks when he is ruled by any lesser authority! Such obedience is a

crime against the dignity of human nature, and the soul is not without

a galling sense of this now and then, when its chains rattle.

III. A service which is freedom because it is rendered by love, or a

service which is hard slavery.

With joy for the abundance of all things.' How sin palls upon us, and

yet we commit it. The will is overborne, conscience is stifled.

IV. A service which feeds the spirit or a service which starves it.

The soul can only in God get what it wants. Prison fare is what it

receives in the other service. The unsatisfying character of all sin;

it cloys, and yet leaves one hungry. It is that which satisfieth not.'

Broken cisterns which hold no water.'

V. A service which is life or a service which is death.

The dark forebodings of the text grow darker as it goes on. The grim

slavery which it threatens as the only alternative to joyful service of

God is declared to be lifelong penal servitude,' and not only is there

no deliverance from it, but it directly tends to wear away the life of

the hopeless slaves. For the words that follow our text are and he

shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.'

That is dismally true in regard to any and every life that has shaken

off the service of God which is perfect freedom, and has persisted in

the service of sin. Such service is suicidal; it rivets an iron yoke on

our necks, and there is no locksmith who can undo the shackles and lift

it off, so long as we refuse to take service with God. Stubbornly

rebellious wills forge their own fetters. Like many a slave-owner, our

tyrants have a cruel delight in killing their slaves, and our sins not

only lead to death, but are themselves death.

But there is a bright possibility before the most down-trodden vassal

of sin. The bond-servant abideth not in the house for ever.' He is not

a son of the house, but has been brought into it, stolen from his home.

He may be carried back to his Father's house, and there have bread

enough and to spare,' if a deliverer can be found. And He has been

found. Christ the Son makes us free, and if we trust Him for our

emancipation we shall be free indeed,' that we, being delivered out of

the hand of our enemies, should serve Him without fear, in holiness and

righteousness before Him all our days.'

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THE SPIRIT OF THE LAW

For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden

from thee, neither is it far off. 12. It is not in heaven, that thou

shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us,

that we may hear it, and do it? 13. Neither is it beyond the sea, that

thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto

us, that we may hear it, and do it? 14. But the word is very nigh unto

thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. 15. See,

I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; 16.

In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in

His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His

judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply; and the Lord thy God

shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it. 17. But

if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be

drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; 18. I denounce unto

you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not

prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go

to possess it. 19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against

you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing:

therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: 20. That

thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey His voice,

and that thou mayest cleave unto Him: for He is thy life, and the

length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the Lord

sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give

them.'--DEUT. xxx. 11-20.

This paragraph closes the legislation of this book, the succeeding

chapters being in the nature of an epilogue or appendix. It sums up the

whole law, makes plain its inmost essence and its tremendous

alternatives. As in the closing strains of some great symphony, the

themes which have run through the preceding movements are woven

together in the final burst of music. Let us try to discover the

component threads of the web.

The first point to note is the lofty conception of the true essence of

the whole law, which is enshrined here. This commandment which I

command thee this day' is twice defined in the section (vs. 16, 20),

and in both instances to love Jehovah thy God' is presented as the

all-important precept. Love is recognised as the great commandment.

Leviticus may deal with minute regulations for worship, but these are

subordinate, and the sovereign commandment is love. Nor is the motive

which should sway to love omitted; for what a tender drawing by the

memories of what He had done for Israel is put forth in the name of

Jehovah, thy God!' The Old Testament system is a spiritual system, and

it too places the very heart of religion in love to God, drawn out by

the contemplation of his self-revelation in his loving dealings with

us. We have here clearly recognised that the obedience which pleases

God is obedience born of love, and that the love which really sets

towards God will, like a powerful stream, turn all the wheels of life

in conformity to His will. When Paul proclaimed that love is the

fulfilling of the law,' he was only repeating the teaching of this

passage, when it puts to walk in His ways,' or to obey His voice,'

after to love Jehovah thy God.' Obedience is the result and test of

love; love is the only parent of real obedience.

The second point strongly insisted on here is the blessedness of

possessing such a knowledge as the law gives. Verses 11-14 present that

thought in three ways. The revelation is not that of duties far beyond

our capacity: It is not too hard for thee.' No doubt, complete

conformity with it is beyond our powers, and entire, whole-hearted, and

whole-souled love of God is not attained even by those who love Him

most. Paul's position that the law gives the knowledge of sin, just

because it presents an impossible elevation in its ideal, is not

opposed to the point of view of this context; for he is thinking of

complete conformity as impossible, while it is thinking of real, though

imperfect, obedience as within the reach of all men. No man can love as

he ought; every man can love. It is blessed to have our obligations all

gathered into such a commandment.

Again, the possession of the law is a blessing, because its

authoritative voice ends the weary quest after some reliable guide to

conduct, and we need neither try to climb to heaven, nor to traverse

the wide world and cross the ocean, to find certitude and enlightenment

enough for our need. They err who think of God's commandments as

grievous burdens; they are merciful guide-posts. They do not so much

lay weights on our backs as give light to our eyes.

Still further, the law has its echo in thy heart.' It is graven on the

fleshly tables of the heart,' and we all respond to it when it gathers

up all duty into Thou shalt love the Lord thy God,' and our consciences

say to it, Thou speakest well.' The worst man knows it better than the

best man keeps it. Blurred and illegible often, like the half-defaced

inscriptions disinterred from the rubbish mounds that once were Nineveh

or Babylon, that law remains written on the hearts of all men.

A further point to be well laid to heart is the merciful plainness and

emphasis with which the issues that are suspended on obedience or

disobedience are declared. The solemn alternatives are before every man

that hears. Life or death, blessing or cursing, are held out to him,

and it is for him to elect which shall be realised in his case. Of

course, it may be said that the words life' and death' are here used in

their merely physical sense, and that the context shows (vs. 17, 18)

that life here means only length of days, that thou mayest dwell in the

land.' No doubt that is so, though we can scarcely refuse to see some

glimmer of a deeper conception gleaming through the words, He is thy

life,' though it is but a glimmer. We have no space here to enter upon

the question of how far it is now true that obedience brings material

blessings. It was true for Israel, as many a sad experience that it was

a bitter as well as an evil thing to forsake Jehovah was to show in the

future. But though the connection between well-doing and material gain

is not so clear now, it is by no means abrogated, either for nations or

for individuals. Moral and religious law has social and economic

consequences, and though the perplexed distribution of earthly good and

ill often bewilders faith and emboldens scepticism, there still is

visible in human affairs a drift towards recompensing in the world the

righteous and the wicked.

But to us, with our Christian consciousness, life' means more than

living, and He is our life' in a deeper and more blessed sense than

that our physical existence is sustained by His continual energy. The

love of God and consequent union with Him give us the only true life.

Jesus is our life,' and He enters the spirit which opens to Him by

faith, and communicates to it a spark of His own immortal life. He that

is joined to Jesus lives; he that is separated from Him is dead while

he liveth.'

The last point here is the solemn responsibility for choosing one's

part, which the revelation of the law brings with it. I have set before

thee life and death, the blessing and the curse, therefore choose

life.' We each determine for ourselves whether the knowledge of what we

ought to be will lead to life or to death, and by choosing obedience we

choose life. Every ray of light from God is capable of producing a

double effect. It either gladdens or pains, it either gives vision or

blindness. The gospel, which is the perfect revelation of God in

Christ, brings every one of us face to face with the great alternative,

and urgently demands from each his personal act of choice whether he

will accept it or neglect or reject it. Not to choose to accept is to

choose to reject. To do nothing is to choose death. The knowledge of

the law was not enough, and neither is an intellectual reception of the

gospel. The one bred Pharisees, who were whited sepulchres'; the other

breeds orthodox professors, who have a name to live and are dead.' The

clearer our light, the heavier our responsibility. If we are to live,

we have to choose life'; and if we do not, by the vigorous exercise of

our will, turn away from earth and self, and take Jesus for our Saviour

and Lord, loving and obeying whom we love and obey God, we have

effectually chosen a worse death than that of the body, and flung away

a better life than that of earth.

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GOD'S TRUE TREASURE IN MAN

The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His

inheritance.'--DEUT. xxxii. 9.

Jesus Christ (Who) gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from

all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people.'--TITUS ii.

14.

I choose these two texts because they together present us with the

other side of the thought to that which I have elsewhere considered,

that man's true treasure is in God. That great axiom of the religious

consciousness, which pervades the whole of Scripture, is rapturously

expressed in many a psalm, and never more assuredly than in that one

which struggles up from the miry clay in which the Psalmist's steps had

well-nigh slipped' and soars and sings thus: The Lord is the portion of

my inheritance and of my cup; Thou maintainest my lot,' The lines are

fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.'

You observe the correspondence between these words and those of my

first text: The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His

inheritance.' The correspondence in the original is not quite so marked

as it is in our Authorised Version, but still the idea in the two

passages is the same. Now it is plain that persons can possess persons

only by love, sympathy, and communion. From that it follows that the

possession must be mutual; or, in other words, that only he can say

Thou art mine' who can say I am Thine.' And so to possess God, and to

be possessed by God, are but two ways of putting the same fact. The

Lord is the portion of His people, and the Lord's portion is His

people,' are only two ways of stating the same truth.

Then my second text clearly quotes the well-known utterance that lies

at the foundation of the national life of Israel: Ye shall be unto Me a

peculiar treasure above all people,' and claims that privilege, like

all Israel's privileges, for the Christian Church. In like manner Peter

(1 Pet. ii. 9) quotes the same words, a peculiar people,' as properly

applying to Christians. I need scarcely remind you that peculiar' here

is used in its proper original sense of belonging to, or, as the

Revised Version gives it, a people for God's own possession' and has no

trace of the modern signification of singular.' Similarly we find Paul

in his Epistle to the Ephesians giving both sides of the idea of the

inheritance in intentional juxtaposition, when he speaks (i. 14) of the

earnest of our inheritance . . . unto the redemption of God's own

possession.' In the words before us we have the same idea; and this

text besides tells us how Christ, the Revealer of God, wins men for

Himself, and what manner of men they must be whom He counts as His.

Therefore there are, as I take it, three things to be spoken about now.

First, God has a special ownership in some people. Second, God owns

these people because He has given Himself to them. Third, God

possesses, and is possessed by, His inheritance, that He may give and

receive services of love. Or, in briefer words, I have to speak about

this wonderful thought of a special divine ownership, what it rests

upon, and what it involves.

I. God has special ownership in some people.

The Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'

Put side by side with those other words of the Old Testament: All souls

are Mine,' or the utterance of the 100th Psalm rightly translated: It

is He that hath made us, and to Him we belong.' There is a right of

absolute and utter ownership and possession inherent in the very

relation of Creator and creature; so that the being made is wholly and

altogether at the disposal, and is the property, of Him that makes him.

But is that enough for God's heart? Is that worth calling ownership at

all? An arbitrary tyrant in an unconstitutional kingdom, or a

slave-owner, may have the most absolute right of property over his

subject or his slave; may have the right of entire disposal of all his

industry, of the profit of all his labour; may be able to do anything

he likes with him, may have the power of life and death; but such

ownership is only of the husk and case of a man: the man himself may be

free, and may smile at the claim of possession. They may own' the body,

and after that have no more than they can do.' That kind of authority

and ownership, absolute and utter, to the point of death, may satisfy a

tyrant or a slave-driver, it does not satisfy the loving heart of God.

It is not real possession at all. In what sense did Nero own Paul when

he shut him up in prison, and cut his head off? Does the slave-owner

own the man whom he whips within an inch of his life, and who dare not

do anything without his permission? Does God, in any sense that

corresponds with the longing of infinite love, own the men that

reluctantly obey Him, and are simply, as it were, tools in His hands?

He covets and longs for a deeper relationship and tenderer ties, and

though all creatures are His, and all men are His servants and His

possession, yet, like certain regiments in our own British army, there

are some who have the right to bear in a special manner on their

uniform and on their banners the emblazonment, The King's Own.' The

Lord's portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance.'

Well, then, the next thought is that the special relationship of

possession is constituted by mutual love. I said at the beginning of

these remarks that as concerns men's relations, the only real

possession is through love, sympathy, and communion, and that that must

necessarily be mutual. We have a perfect right to apply the human

analogy here; in fact, we are bound to do it if we would rightly

understand such words as those of my text; and it just leads us to

this, that the one thing whereby God reckons that He possesses a man at

all is when His love falls upon that man's heart and soaks into it, and

when there springs up in the heart a corresponding emotion and

affection. The men who welcome the divine love that goes through the

whole world, seeking such to worship it, and to trust it, and to become

its own; and who therefore lovingly yield to the loving divine will,

and take it for their law--these are the men whom He regards as His

portion' and the lot of His inheritance.' So that God is mine, and that

I am God's,' are two ends of one truth; I possess Him,' and I am

possessed by Him,' are but the statement of one fact expressed from two

points of view. In the one case you look upon it from above, in the

other case you look upon it from beneath. All the sweet commerce of

mutual surrender and possession which makes the joy of our hearts, in

friendship and in domestic life, we have the right to lift up into this

loftier region, and find in it the last teaching of what makes the

special bond of mutual possession between God and man.

And deep words of Scripture point in that direction. Those parables of

our Lord's: the lost sheep, the lost coin, the lost son, in their

infinite beauty, whilst they contain a great deal besides this, do

contain this in their several ways; the money, the animal, the man

belong to the woman of the house, to the shepherd, to the father. Each

is lost' in a different fashion, but the most clear revelation is given

in the last parable of the three, which explains the other two. The son

was lost' when he did not love the father; and he was found' by the

father when he returned the yearning of the father's heart.

And so, dear brethren, it ever is; the one thing that knits men to God

is that the silken cord of love let down from Heaven should by our own

hand be wrapped round our own hearts, and then we are united to Him. We

are His and He is ours by the double action of His love manifested by

Him, and His love received by us.

Now there is nothing in all that of favouritism. The declaration that

there are people who have a special relationship to the divine heart

may be so stated as to have a very ugly look, and it often has been so

stated as to be nothing more than self-complacent Pharisaism, which

values a privilege principally because its possession is an insult to

somebody else that has it not.

There has been plenty of Christianity of that sort in the world, but

there is nothing of it in the thoughts of these texts rightly looked

at. There is only this: it cannot but be that men who yield to God and

love Him, and try to live near Him and to do righteousness, are His in

a manner that those who steel themselves against Him and turn away from

Him are not. Whilst all creatures have a place in His heart, and are

flooded with His benefits, and get as much of Him as they can hold, the

men who recognise the source of their blessing, and turn to it with

grateful hearts, are nearer Him than those that do not do so. Let us

take care, lest for the sake of seeming to preserve the impartiality of

His love, we have destroyed all in Him that makes His love worth

having. If to Him the good and the bad, the men who fear Him and the

men who fear Him not, are equally satisfactory, and, in the same

manner, the objects of an equal love, then He is not a God that has

pleasure in righteousness; and if He is not a God that has pleasure in

righteousness,' He is not a God for us to trust to. We are not giving

countenance to the notion that God has any step-children, any petted

members of His family, when we cleave to this--they that have welcomed

His love into their hearts are nearer to Him than those that have

closed the door against it.

And there is one more point here about this matter of ownership on

which I dwell for a moment, namely, that this conception of certain men

being in a special sense God's possession and inheritance means also

that He has a special delight in, and lofty appreciation of, them. All

this material creation exists for the sake of growing good men and

women. That is the use of the things that are seen and temporal; they

are like greenhouses built for the great Gardener's use in striking and

furthering the growth of His plants; and when He has got the plants He

has got what He wanted, and you may pull the greenhouse down if you

like. And so God estimates, and teaches us to estimate, the relative

value and greatness of the material and the spiritual in this fashion,

that He says to us in effect: All these magnificences and magnitudes

round you are small and vulgar as compared with this--a heart in which

wisdom and divine truth and the love and likeness of God have attained

to some tolerable measure of maturity and of strength.' These are His

jewels,' as the Roman matron said about her two boys. The great Father

looks upon the men that love Him as His jewels, and, having got the

jewels, the rock in which they were embedded and preserved may be

crushed when you like. They shall be Mine,' saith the Lord, My

treasures in that day of judgment which I make.'

And so, my brother, all the insignificance of man, as compared with the

magnitude and duration of the universe, need not stagger our faith that

the divinest thing in the universe is a heart that has learnt to love

God and aspires after Him, and should but increase our wonder and our

gratitude that He has been mindful of man and has visited him, in order

that He might give Himself to men, and so might win men for Himself.

II. That brings me, and very briefly, to the other points that I desire

to deal with now. The second one, which is suggested to us from my

second text in the Epistle to Titus, is that this possession, by God,

of man, like man's possession of God, comes because God has given

Himself to man.

The Apostle puts it very strongly in the Epistle to Titus: The glorious

appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave

Himself for us that He might purify unto Himself a people for a

possession.' Israel, according to one metaphor, was God's son,'

begotten by that great redeeming act of deliverance from the captivity

of Egypt (Deut. xxxii. 6-19). According to another metaphor, Israel was

God's bride, wooed and won for His own by that same act. Both of these

figures point to the thought that in order to get man for His own He

has to give Himself to man.

And the very height and sublimity of that truth is found in the

Christian fact which the Apostle points to here. We need not depart

from human analogies here either. Christ gave Himself to us that He

might acquire us for Himself. Absolute possession of others is only

possible at the price of absolute surrender to them. No human heart

ever gave itself away unless it was convinced that the heart to which

it gave itself had given itself to it.

And on the lower levels of gratitude and obligation, the only thing

that binds a man to another in utter submission is the conviction that

that other has given himself in absolute sacrifice for him. A doctor

goes into the wards of an hospital with his life in his hands, and

because he does, he wins the full confidence and affection of those

whom he treats. You cannot buy a heart with anything less than a heart.

In the barter of the world it is not skin for skin,' but it is self for

self'; and if you want to own me, you must give yourself altogether to

me. And the measure in which teachers and guides and preachers and

philanthropists of all sorts make conquests of men is the measure in

which they make themselves sacrifices for men.

Now all that is true, and is lifted to its superlative truth, in the

great central fact of the Christian faith. But there is more than human

analogy here. Christ is not only self-sacrifice in the sense of

surrender, but He is sacrifice in the sense of giving Himself for our

redemption and forgiveness. He has not only given Himself to us, He has

given Himself for us. And there, and on that, is builded, and on that

alone has He a right to build, or have we a right to yield to it, His

claim to absolute authority and utter command over each of us.

He has died for us, therefore the springs of our life are at His

disposal; and the strongest motives which can sway our lives are set in

motion by His touch. His death, says this text, redeems us from

iniquity and purifies us. That points to its power in delivering us

from the service and practice of sin. He buys us from the despot whose

slaves we were, and makes us His own in the hatred of evil and the

doing of righteousness. Moved by His death, we become capable of

heroisms and martyrdoms of devotion to Him. Brethren, it is only as

that self-sacrificing love touches us, which died for our sins upon the

Cross, that the diabolical chain of selfishness will be broken from our

affections and our wills, and we shall be led into the large place of

glad surrender of ourselves to the sweetness and the gentle authority

of His omnipotent love.

III. The last thought that I suggest is the issues to which this mutual

possession points. God owns men, and is owned by them, in order that

there may be a giving and receiving of mutual services of love.

The Lord's portion is His people.' That in the Old Testament is always

laid as the foundation of certain obligations under which He has come,

and which He will abundantly discharge. What is a great landlord

expected to do to his estate? What ought I to have done to my

vineyard?' the divine Proprietor asks through the mouth of His servant

the prophet. He ought to till it, He ought not to starve it, He ought

to fence it, He ought to cast a wall about it, He ought to reap the

fruits. And He does all that for His inheritance. God's honour is

concerned in His portion not being waste. It is not to be a garden of

the sluggard,' by which people who pass can see the thorns growing

there. So He will till it, He will plough it, He will pick out the

weeds, and all the disciplines of life will come to us, and the

ploughshare will be driven deep into the heart, that the peaceable

fruit of righteousness' may spring up. He will fence His vineyard.

Round about His inheritance His hand will be cast, within His people

His Spirit will dwell. No harm shall come near thee if thy love is

given to Him; safe and untouched by evil thou shalt walk if thou walk

with God. He that toucheth you toucheth the apple of Mine eye.' The

soul that trusts Him He takes in charge, and before any evil can fall

to it the pillared firmament must be rottenness, and earth be built on

stubble.' He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him

against that day.' The Lord's portion is His people,' and none shall

pluck them out of His hand.'

And on the other side, we belong to God in Christ. What do we owe Him?

What does the vineyard owe the husbandman? Fruit. We are His, therefore

we are bound to absolute submission. Ye are not your own.' Life,

circumstances, occupations, all--we hold them at His will. We have no

more right of property in anything than a slave in the bad old days had

in his cabin and patch of ground. They belonged to the master to whom

he belonged. Let us recognise our stewardship, and be glad to know

ourselves His, and all events and things which we sometimes think ours,

His also.

We are His, therefore we owe absolute trust. The slave has at least

this blessing in his lot, that he need have no anxieties; nor need we.

We belong to God, and He will take care of us. A rich man's horses and

dogs are well cared for, and our Owner will not leave us unheeded. Our

well-being involves His good name. Leave anxious thought to masterless

hearts which have to front the world with nobody at their backs. If you

are God's you will be looked after.

We are His, therefore we are bound to live to His praise. That is the

conclusion which one Old Testament passage draws. This people have I

formed for Myself; they shall show forth My praise' (Isaiah xliii. 21).

The Apostle Peter quotes these words immediately after those from

Exodus, which describe Israel as a people for God's own possession,'

when he says that ye should show forth the praise of Him who hath

called you.' Let us, then, live to His glory, and remember that the

servants of the King are bound to stand to their colours amid rebels,

and that they who know the sweetness of possessing God, and the

blessedness of yielding to His supreme control, should acknowledge what

they have found of His goodness, and tell forth the honour of His name,

and make His praise glorious.' Let not all the magnificent and

wonderful expenditure of divine longing and love be in vain, nor run

off your hearts like water poured upon a rock. Surely the sun's flames

leaping leagues high, they tell us, in tongues of burning gas, must

melt everything that is near them. Shall we keep our hearts sullen and

cold before such a fire of love? Surely that superb and wonderful

manifestation of the love of God in the Cross of Christ should melt

into running rivers of gratitude all the ice of our hearts.

He gave Himself for me!' Let us turn to Him and say: Lo! I give myself

to Thee. Thou art mine. Make me Thine by the constraint of Thy love, so

utterly, and so saturate my spirit with Thyself, that it shall not only

be Thine, but in a very deep sense it shall be Thee, and that it may be

"no more I that live, but Christ that liveth in me."'

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THE EAGLE AND ITS BROOD

As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth

abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.'--DEUT.

xxxii. 11.

This is an incomplete sentence in the Authorised Version, but really it

should be rendered as a complete one; the description of the eagle's

action including only the two first clauses, and (the figure being

still retained) the person spoken of in the last clauses being God

Himself. That is to say, it should read thus, As an eagle stirreth up

his nest, fluttereth over his young, He spreads abroad His wings, takes

them, bears them on His pinions.' That is far grander, as well as more

compact, than the somewhat dragging comparison which, according to the

Authorised Version, is spread over the whole verse and tardily

explained, in the following, by a clause introduced by an unwarranted

So'--the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with

him.'

Now, of course, we all know that the original reference of these words

is to the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, and their training

in the desert. In the solemn address by Jehovah at the giving of the

law (Exodus xix. 4), the same metaphor is employed, and, no doubt, that

passage was the source of the extended imagery here. There we read, Ye

know what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings,

and brought you unto Myself.' The meaning of the glowing metaphor, with

its vivid details, is just that Jehovah brought Israel out of its fixed

abode in Goshen, and trained it for mature national life by its varied

desert experiences. As one of the prophets puts the same idea, I taught

Ephraim to go,' where the figure of the parent bird training its callow

fledglings for flight is exchanged for that of the nurse teaching a

child to walk. While, then, the text primarily refers to the experience

of the infant nation in the forty years' wanderings, it carries large

truths about us all; and sets forth the true meaning and importance of

life. There seem to me to be three thoughts here, which I desire to

touch on briefly: first, a great thought about God; then an

illuminating thought about the true meaning and aspect of life; and

lastly a calming thought about the variety of the methods by which God

carries out our training.

I. Here is a great thought about God.

Now, it may come as something of a shock if I say that the bird that is

selected for the comparison is not really the eagle, but one which, in

our estimation, is of a very much lower order--viz. the carnivorous

vulture. But a poetical emblem is not the less fitting, though, besides

the points of resemblance, the thing which is so used has others less

noble. Our modern repugnance to the vulture as feeding on carcasses was

probably not felt by the singer of this song. What he brings into view

are the characteristics common to the eagle and the vulture; superb

strength in beak and claw, keenness of vision almost incredible,

magnificent sweep of pinion and power of rapid, unwearied flight. And

these characteristics, we may say, have their analogues in the divine

nature, and the emblem not unfitly shadows forth one aspect of the God

of Israel, who is fearful in praises,' who is strong to destroy as well

as to save, whose all-seeing eye marks every foul thing, and who often

pounces on it swiftly to rend it to pieces, though the sky seemed empty

a moment before.

But the action described in the text is not destructive, terrible, or

fierce. The monarch of the sky busies itself with tender cares for its

brood. Then, there is gentleness along with the terribleness. The

strong beak and claw, the gaze that can see so far, and the mighty

spread of wings that can lift it till it is an invisible speck in the

blue vault, go along with the instinct of paternity: and the fledglings

in the nest look up at the fierce beak and bright eyes, and know no

terror. The impression of this blending of power and gentleness is

greatly deepened, as it seems to me, if we notice that it is the male

bird that is spoken about in the text, which should be rendered: As the

eagle stirreth up his nest and fluttereth over his young.'

So we just come to the thought that we must keep the true balance

between these two aspects of that great divine nature--the majesty, the

terror, the awfulness, the soaring elevation, the all-penetrating

vision, the power of the mighty pinion, one stroke of which could crush

a universe into nothing; and, on the other side, the yearning instinct

of Fatherhood, the love and gentleness, and all the tender ministries

for us, His children, to which these lead. Brethren, unless we keep

hold of both of these in due equipoise and inseparably intertwining, we

damage the one which we retain almost as much as the one which we

dismiss. For there is no love like the love that is strong, and can be

fierce, and there is no condescension like the condescension of Him who

is the Highest, in order that He may be, and because He is ready to be,

the lowest. Modern tendencies, legitimately recoiling from the

one-sidedness of a past generation, are now turning away far too much

from the Old Testament conceptions of Jehovah, which are concentrated

in that metaphor of the vulture in the sky. And thereby we destroy the

love, in the name of which we scout the wrath.

Infinite mercy, but, I wis,

As infinite a justice too.'

As the vulture stirreth up his nest,'--that is the Old Testament

revelation of the terribleness and gentleness of Jehovah. How often

would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth

her chickens under her wing?'--that is the New Testament modification

of the image. But you never could have had the New unless you first had

had the Old. And you are a foolish man if, in the name of the sanctity

of the New, you cast away the teaching of the Old. Keep both the

metaphors, and they will explain and confirm each other.

II. Here we have an illuminating thought of the meaning of life.

What is it all for? To teach us to fly, to exercise our half-fledged

wings in short flights, that may prepare us for, and make it possible

to take, longer ones. Every event that befalls us has a meaning beyond

itself; and every task that we have to do reacts upon us, the doers,

and either fits or hinders us for larger work. Life as a whole, and in

its minutest detail, is worthy of God to give, and worthy of us to

possess, only if we recognise the teaching that is put into picturesque

form in this text--that the meaning of all which God does to us is to

train us for something greater yonder. Life as a whole is full of sound

and fury, signifying nothing,' unless it is an apprenticeship training.

What are we here for? To make character. That is the aim and end of

all--to make character; to get experience; to learn the use of our

tools. I declare it seems to me that the world had better be wiped out

altogether, incontinently, unless there is a world beyond, where a man

shall use the force which here he made his own. Thou hast been faithful

in a few things; behold I will make thee ruler over many things.' No

man gets to the heart of the mystery of life or has in his hand the key

which will enable him to unlock all the doors and difficulties of human

experience, unless he gets to this--that it is all meant as training.

If we could only carry that clear conviction with us day by day into

the little things of life, what different things these, which we call

the monotonous trifles of our daily duties, would become! The things

may be small and unimportant, but the way in which we do them is not

unimportant. The same fidelity may be exercised, and must be brought to

bear, in order to do the veriest trifle of our daily lives rightly, as

needs to be invoked, in order to get us safely through the crises and

great times of life. There are no great principles for great duties,

and little ones for little duties. We have to regulate all our conduct

by the same laws. Life is built up of trifles, as mica-flakes, if there

be enough of them, make the Alpine summits towering thousands of feet

into the blue. Character may be manifested in the great moments, but it

is made in the small ones. So, life is meant for discipline, and unless

we use it for that, however much enjoyment we get out of it, we misuse

it.

III. Lastly, there is here a calming thought as to the variety of God's

methods with us.

As the eagle stirreth up his nest.' No doubt the callow brood are much

warmer and more comfortable in the nest than when they are turned out

of it. The Israelites were by no means enamoured with the prospect of

leaving the flesh-pots and the onions and the farmhouses that they had

got for themselves in Goshen, to tramp with their cattle through the

wilderness. They went after Moses with considerable disinclination.

Here we have, then, as the first thing needed, God's loving compulsion

to effort. To stir up the nest' means to make a man uncomfortable where

he is;--sometimes by the prickings of his conscience, which are often

the voices of God's Spirit; sometimes by changes of circumstances,

either for the better or for the worse; and oftentimes by sorrows. The

straw is pulled out of the nest, and it is not so comfortable to lie

in; or a bit of it develops a sharp point that runs into the

half-feathered skin, and makes the fledgling glad to come forth into

the air. We all shrink from change. What should we do if we had it not?

We should stiffen into habits that would dwarf and weaken us. We all

recoil from storms. What should we do if we had them not? Sea and air

would stagnate, and become heavy and putrid and pestilential, if it

were not for the wild west wind and the hurtling storms. So all our

changes, instead of being whimpered over, and all our sorrows, instead

of being taken reluctantly, should be recognised as being what they

are, loving summonses to effort. Then their pressure would be modified,

and their blessing would be secured when their purpose was served.

But the training of the father-eagle is not confined to stirring up the

nest. What is to become of the young ones when they get out of it, and

have never been accustomed to bear themselves up in the invisible ether

about them? So he fluttereth over his young.' It is a very beautiful

word that is employed here, which flutter' scarcely gives us. It is the

same word that is used in the first chapter of Genesis, about the

Spirit of God brooding on the face of the waters'; and it suggests how

near, how all-protecting with expanded wings, the divine Father comes

to the child whose restfulness He has disturbed.

And is not that true? Had you ever trouble that you took as from Him,

which did not bring that hovering presence nearer you, until you could

almost feel the motion of the wing, and be brushed by it as it passed

protectingly above your head? Ah, yes! Stirring the nest' is meant to

be the precursor of closer approach of the Father to us; and if we take

our changes and our sorrows as loving summonses from Him to effort, be

sure that we shall realise Him as near to us, in a fashion that we

never did before.

That is not all. There is sustaining power. He spreadeth abroad his

wings; he taketh them; beareth them on his wings.' On those broad

pinions we are lifted, and by them we are guarded. It matters little

whether the belief that the parent bird thus carries the young, when

wearied with their short flights, is correct or not. The truth which

underlies the representation is what concerns us. The beautiful

metaphor is a picturesque way of saying, In all their afflictions He

was afflicted; and the Angel of His presence saved them.' It is a

picturesque way of saying, Thou canst do all things through Christ

which strengtheneth thee.' And we may be very sure that if we let Him

stir up our nests' and obey His loving summons to effort, He will come

very near to strengthen us for our attempts, and to bear us up when our

own weak wings fail. The Psalmist sang that angels' hands should bear

up God's servant. That is little compared with this promise of being

carried heavenwards on Jehovah's own pinions. A vile piece of Greek

mythology tells how Jove once, in the guise of an eagle, bore away a

boy between his great wings. It is foul where it stands, but it is

blessedly true about Christian experience. If only we lay ourselves on

God's wings--and that not in idleness, but having ourselves tried our

poor little flight--He will see that no harm comes to us.

During life this training will go on; and after life, what then? Then,

in the deepest sense, the old word will be true, Ye know how I bore you

on eagle's wings and brought you to Myself'; and the great promise

shall be fulfilled, when the half-fledged young brood are matured and

full grown, They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run

and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.'

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THEIR ROCK AND OUR ROCK

Their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being

Judges.'--DEUT. xxxii. 31.

Moses is about to leave the people whom he had led so long, and his

last words are words of solemn warning. He exhorts them to cleave to

God. The words of the text simply mean that the history of the nation

had sufficiently proved that God, their God, was above all gods.' The

Canaanites and all the enemies whom Israel had fought had been beaten,

and in their awe of this warrior people acknowledged that their idols

had found their lord. The great suit of Jehovah versus Idols' has long

since been decided. Every one acknowledges that Christianity is the

only religion possible for twentieth century men. But the words of the

text lend themselves to a wider application, and clothe in a

picturesque garb the universal truth that the experience of godless men

proves the futility of their objects of trust, when compared with that

of him whose refuge is in God.

I. God is a Rock to them that trust Him.

We note the singular frequency of that designation in this song, in

which it occurs six times. It is also found often in the Psalms. If

Moses were the singer, we might see in this often-repeated metaphor a

trace of influence of the scenery of the Sinaitic peninsula, which

would he doubly striking to eyes accustomed to the alluvial plains of

Egypt. What are the aspects of the divine nature set forth by this

name?

(1) Firm foundation: the solid eternity of the rock on which we can

build.

Petra: faithfulness to promises, unchanging.

(2) Refuge: refuge from the storm'; my rock and my fortress and my high

tower.'

(3) Refreshment: rock from which water gushed out; and (4) Repose:

shadow of a great rock'; shadow from the heat.'

Trace the image through Scripture, from this song till Christ's parable

of the man who built his house on a rock.'

II. Every man's experience shows him that there is no such refuge

anywhere else.

We do not assert that every man consciously comes to that conclusion.

All we say is that he would do so if he rightly pondered the facts. The

history of every life is a history of disappointment. Take these

particulars just stated and ask yourselves: What does experience say as

to the possibility of our possessing such blessings apart from God?

There is no need for us to exaggerate, for the naked reality is sad

enough. If God is not our best Good, we have no solid good. Every other

rock' crumbles into sand. Else why this restless change, why this

disquiet, why the constant repetition, generation after generation, of

the old, old wail, Vanity of vanities, all is vanity'? Why does every

heart say Amen to the poet and the dramatist singing of the fever and

the fret,' the tragic fare of man's life?

Our appeal is not to men in the flush of excitement, but to them in

their hours of solitary sane reflection. It is from Philip drunk to

Philip sober.' We each have material for judging in our own case, and

in the cases of some others. The experiment of living with other rocks'

than God has been tried for millenniums now. What has been the issue?

You know what Christianity claims that it can do to make a life stable

and safe. Do you know anything else that can? You know what Christian

men will calmly say that they have found. Can you say as much? Let us

hear some dying testimonies. Hearken to Jacob: The God which hath fed

me all my life long unto this day, the Angel which redeemed me from all

evil.' Hearken to Moses: The Rock, His work is perfect, for all His

ways are judgment, a God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and

right is He.' Hearken to Joshua: Not one good thing hath failed of all

the good things which the Lord your God spake.' Hearken to David: The

Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want . . .. Surely goodness and mercy

shall follow me all the days of my life.' Hearken to Paul: The Lord

stood by me and strengthened me, and I was delivered . . . the Lord

will deliver me from every evil work and will save me unto His heavenly

kingdom.' What man who has chosen to take refuge or build on men and

creatures can look backward and forward in such fashion?

III. Every man's own nature tells him that God is his true Rock.

Again I say that here I do not appeal to the surface of our

consciousness, nor to men who have sophisticated themselves, nor to

people who have sinned themselves, into hardness, but to the voice of

the inner man which speaks in the depths of each man's being.

There is the cry of Want: the manifest want of the soul for God.

There is the voice of Reason.

There is the voice of Conscience.

IV. Yet many of us will not take God for our Rock.

Surely it is a most extraordinary thing that men should be judges,'

being convinced in their deepest consciousness that God is the only

Foundation and Refuge, and yet that the conviction should have

absolutely no influence on their conduct. The same stark, staring

inconsequence is visible in many other departments of life, but in this

region it works its most tragic results. The message which many of my

hearers need most is--follow out your deepest convictions, and be true

to the inward voice which condenses all your experience into the one

counsel to take God for the strength of your hearts and your portion

for ever,' for only in Him will you find what you need for life and

strength and riches. If He is our Rock,' then we shall have a firm

foundation, a safe refuge, inexhaustible refreshment and untroubled

rest. Lives founded on aught beside are built on sand and will be full

of tremors and unsettlements, and at last the despairing builder and

his ruined house will be washed away with the dissolving sandbank and

shoal of time' on which he built.

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GOD AND HIS SAINTS

He loved the people; all His saints are in Thy hand: and they sat down

at Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.'--DEUT. xxxiii. 3.

The great ode of which these words are a part is called the blessing

wherewith Moses blessed the children of Israel before his death.' It is

mainly an invocation of blessing from Heaven on the various tribes, but

it begins, as the national existence of Israel began, with the

revelation of God on Sinai, and it lays that as the foundation of

everything. It does not matter, for my purposes, in the smallest

degree, who was the author of this great song. Whoever he was, he has,

by dint of divine inspiration and of his own sympathy with the inmost

spirit of the Old Covenant, anticipated the deepest things of Christian

truth; and these are here in the words of our text.

I. The first thing that I would point out is the Divine Love which is

the foundation of all.

He loved the people.' That is the beginning of everything. The word

that this singer uses is one that only appears in this place, and if we

regard its etymology, there lies in it a very tender and beautiful

expression of the warmth of the divine love, for it is probably

connected with words in an allied language which mean the bosom and a

tender embrace, and so the picture that we have is of that great divine

Lover folding the people' to His heart, as a mother might her child,

and cherishing them in His bosom.

Still further, the word is in a form in the Hebrew which implies that

the act spoken about is neither past, present, nor future only, but

continuous and perpetual. Thus it suggests to us the thought of

timeless, eternal love, which has no beginning, and therefore has no

end, which does not grow, and therefore will never decline nor decay,

but which runs on upon one lofty level, with neither ups nor downs, and

with no variation of the impulse which sends it forth; always the same,

and always holding its objects in the fervent embrace of which the text

speaks.

Further, mark the place in this great song where this thought comes in.

As I said, it is laid as the beginning of everything. We love Him

because He first loved us' was the height to which the last of the

Apostles attained in the last of his writings. But this old singer,

with the mists of antiquity around him, who knew nothing about the

Cross, nothing about the historical Christ, who had only that which

modern thinkers tell us is a revelation of a wrathful God, somehow or

other rose to the height of the evangelical conception of God's love as

the foundation of the very existence of a people who are His. Like an

orchid growing on a block of dry wood and putting forth a gorgeous

bloom, this singer, with so much less to feed his faith than we have,

has yet borne this fair flower of deep and devout insight into the

secret of things and the heart of God. He loved the people'-- therefore

He formed them for Himself; therefore He brought them out of bondage;

therefore He came down in flashing fire on Sinai and made known His

will, which to know and do is life. All begins from the tender,

timeless love of God.

And if the question is asked, Why does God thus love? the only answer

is, Because he is God. Not for your sakes, O house of Israel . . . but

for Mine own name's sake.' The love of God is self-originated. In it,

as in all His acts, He is His own motive, as His name, I am that I am,'

proclaims. It is inseparable from His being, and flows forth before,

and independent of, anything in the creature which could draw it out.

Men's love is attracted by their perception or their imagination of

something loveable in its objects. It is like a well, where there has

to be much work of the pump-handle before the gush comes. God's love is

like an artesian well, or a fountain springing up from unknown depths

in obedience to its own impulse. All that we can say is, Thou art God.

It is Thy nature and property to be merciful.'

God loved the people.' The bed-rock is the spontaneous, unalterable,

inexhaustible, ever-active, fervent love of God, like that with which a

mother clasps her child to her maternal breast. The fair flower of this

great thought was a product of Judaism. Let no man say that the God of

Love is unknown to the Old Testament.

II. Notice how, with this for a basis, we have next the guardian care

extended to all those that answer love by love.

The singer goes on to say, mixing up his pronouns, in the fashion of

Hebrew poetry, somewhat arbitrarily, all His saints are in Thy hand.'

Now, what is a saint'? A man who answers God's love by his love. The

notion of a saint has been marred and mutilated by the Church and the

world. It has been taken as a special designation of certain selected

individuals, mostly of the ascetic and monastic type, whereas it

belongs to every one of God's people. It has been taken by the world to

mean sanctimoniousness and not sanctity, and is a term of contempt

rather than of admiration on their lips. And even those of us, who have

got beyond thinking that it is a title of honour belonging only to the

aristocracy of Christ's Kingdom, are too apt to mistake what it really

does mean. It may be useful to say a word about the Scriptural use and

true meaning of that much-abused term. The root idea of sanctity or

holiness is not moral character, goodness of disposition and of action,

but it is separation from the world and consecration to God. As surely

as a magnet applied to a heap of miscellaneous filings will pick out

every little bit of iron there, so surely will that love which He bears

to the people, when it is responded to, draw to itself, and therefore

draw out of the heap, the men that feel its impulse and its

preciousness. And so saint' means, secondly, righteous and pure, but it

means, first, knit to God, separated from evil, and separated by the

power of His received love.

Now, brethren, here is a question for each of us: Do I yield to that

timeless, tender clasp of the divine Father and Mother in one? Do I

answer it by my love? If I do, then I am a saint,' because I belong to

Him, and He belongs to me, and in that commerce I have broken with the

world. If we are true to ourselves, and true to our Lord, and true to

the relation between us, the purity of character, which is popularly

supposed to be the meaning of holiness, will come. Not without effort,

not without set-backs, not without slow advance, but it will come; for

he that is consecrated to the Lord is separated' from iniquity. Such is

the meaning of saint.'

All His saints are in Thy hand.' The first metaphor of our text spoke

of God's bosom, to which He drew the people and folded them there. This

one speaks of His hand.' They lie in it. That means two things. It

means absolute security, for will He not close His fingers over His

palm to keep the soul that has laid itself there? And none shall pluck

them out of My Father's hand.' No one but yourself can do that. And you

can do it, if you cease to respond to His love, and so cease to be a

saint. Then you will fall out of His hand, and how far you will fall

God only knows.

Being in God's hand means also submission. Loyola said to his black

army, Be like a stick in a man's hand.' That meant utter submission and

abnegation of self, the willingness to be put anywhere, and used

anyhow, and done anything with. And if I by my reception of, and

response to, that timeless love, am a saint belonging to God, then not

only shall I be secure, but I must be submissive. All His saints are in

Thy hand.' Do not try to get out of it; be content to let it guide you

as the steersman's hand turns the spokes of the wheel and directs the

ship.

Now, there is a last thought here. I have spoken of the foundation of

all as being divine love, of the security and guardian care of the

saints, and there follows one thought more:--

III. The docile obedience of those that are thus guarded.

As the words stand in our Bible, they are as follow:--They sat down at

Thy feet; every one shall receive of Thy words.' These two clauses make

up one picture, and one easily understands what it is. It represents a

group of docile scholars, sitting at the Master's feet. He is teaching

them, and they listen open-mouthed and open-eared to what he says, and

will take his words into their lives, like Mary sitting at Christ's

feet, whilst Martha was bustling about His meal. But, beautiful as that

picture is, there has been suggested a little variation in the words

which gives another one that strikes me as being even more beautiful.

There are some difficulties of language with which I need not trouble

you. But the general result is this, that perhaps instead of sitting

down at Thy feet' we should read followed at Thy feet.' That suggests

the familiar metaphor of a guide and those led by him who, without him,

know not their road. As a dog follows his master, as the sheep their

shepherd, so, this singer felt, will saints follow the God whom they

love. Religion is imitation of God. That was a deep thought for such a

stage of revelation, and it in part anticipates Christ's tender words:

He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him, for they know His

voice.' They follow at His feet. That is the blessedness and the power

of Christian morality, that it is keeping close at Christ's heels, and

that instead of its being said to us, Go,' He says, Come,' and instead

of our being bid to hew out for ourselves a path of duty, He says to

us, He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the

light of life.' They follow at His feet, as the dog at his master's, as

the sheep at their shepherd's.

They receive His words.' Yes, if you will keep close to Him, He will

turn round and speak to you. If you are near enough to Him to catch His

whisper He will not leave you without guidance. That is one side of the

thought, that following we receive what He says, whereas the people

that are away far behind Him scarcely know what His will is, and never

can catch the low whisper which will come to us by providences, by

movements in our own spirits, through the exercise of our own faculties

of judgment and common-sense, if only we will keep near to Him. Be ye

not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose

mouths must be held in with bit and with bridle, else they will not

come near to thee,' but walk close behind Him, and then the promise

will be fulfilled: I will guide thee with Mine eye.' A glance tells two

people who are in sympathy what each wishes, and Jesus Christ will

speak to us, if we keep close at His heels.

They that follow Him will receive His words' in another sense. They

will take them in, and His words will not be wasted. And they will

receive them in yet another sense. They will carry them out and do

them, and His words will not be in vain.

So, dear brethren, the peace, the strength, the blessedness, the

goodness, of our lives flow from these three stages, which this singer

so long ago had found to be the essence of everything, recognition of

the timeless tenderness of God, the yielding to and answering that

love, so that it separates us for Himself, the calm security and happy

submission which follow thereon, the imitation of Him in daily life,

and the walking in His steps, which is rewarded and made more perfect

by hearing more distinctly the whisper of His loving, commanding voice.

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ISRAEL THE BELOVED

The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him; and the Lord

shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His

shoulders.'--DEUT. xxxiii. 12.

Benjamin was his father's favourite child, and the imagery of this

promise is throughout drawn from the relations between such a child and

its father. So far as the future history of the tribes is shadowed in

these blessings' of this great ode, the reference of the text may be to

the tribe of Benjamin, as specially distinguished by Saul having been a

member of it, and by the Temple having been built on its soil. But we

find that each of the promises of the text is repeated elsewhere, with

distinct reference to the whole nation. For example, the first one, of

safe dwelling, reappears in verse 28 in reference to Israel; the second

one, of God's protecting covering, is extended to the nation in many

places; and the third, of dwelling between His shoulders, is in

substance found again in chap. i. 31, the Lord thy God bare thee, as a

man doth bear his son.' So that we may give the text a wider extension,

and take it as setting forth under a lovely metaphor, and with a

restricted reference, what is true of all God's children everywhere and

always.

I. Who are the beloved of the Lord'?

The first answer to that question must be--all men. But these great

blessings, so beautifully shadowed in this text, do not belong to all

men; nor does the designation, the beloved of the Lord,' belong to all

men, but to those who have entered into a special relation to Him. In

these words of the Hebrew singer there sound the first faint tones of a

music that was to swell into clear notes, when Jesus said: If a man

love Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will

come unto him, and make Our abode with him.' They who are knit by faith

and love to God's only-begotten and beloved Son, by that union receive

power to become the sons of God,' and share in the love which is ever

pouring out from the Father's heart on the Son of His love.'

II. What are their blessed privileges?

The three clauses of the text express substantially the same idea, but

with a striking variety of metaphors.

1. They have a sure dwelling-place.

There is a very slight change of rendering of the first clause, which

greatly increases its force, and preserves the figure that is obscured

by the usual translation. We should read shall dwell safely on,' rather

than by, Him.' And the effect of that small change in the preposition

is to bring out the thought that God is regarded as the foundation on

which His beloved build their house of life, and dwell in security and

calm. If we are sons through the Son, we shall build our houses or

pitch our tents on that firm ground, and, being founded on the Rock of

ages, they will not fall when all created foundations reel to the

overthrow of whatever is built on them. It is not companionship only,

blessed as that is, that is promised here. We have a larger privilege

than dwelling by Him, for if we love His Son, we build on God, and God

dwelleth in us and we in Him.'

What spiritual reality underlies the metaphor of dwelling or building

on God? The fact of habitual communion.

Note the blessed results of such grounding of our lives on God through

such habitual communion. We shall dwell safely.' We may think of that

as being objective safety--that is, freedom from peril, or as being

subjective--that is, freedom from care or fear, or as meaning

trustfully,' confidently, as the expression is rendered in Psalm xvi. 9

(margin), which is for us the ground of both these. He who dwells in

God trustfully dwells both safely and securely, and none else is free

either from danger or from dread.

2. They have a sure shelter.

God is for His beloved not only the foundation on which they dwell in

safety, but their perpetual covering. They dwell safely because He is

so. There are many tender shapes in which this great promise is

presented to our faith. Sometimes God is thought of as covering the

weak fugitive, as the arching sides of His cave sheltered David from

Saul. Sometimes He is represented as covering His beloved, who cower

under His wings, as the hen gathereth her chickens' when hawks are in

the sky. Sometimes He appears as covering them from tempest, when the

blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall,' and the

shadow of a great rock' shields from its fury. Sometimes He is pictured

as stretching out protection over His beloved's heads, as the Pillar of

cloud lay, long-drawn-out, over the Tabernacle when at rest, and on all

the Glory was a defence.' But under whatever emblem the general idea of

a covering shelter was conceived, there was always a correlative duty

on our side. For the root-meaning of one of the Old Testament words for

faith' is fleeing to a refuge,' and we shall not be safe in God unless

by faith we flee for refuge to Him in Christ.

3. They have a Father who bears them on His shoulders.

The image is the same as in chap. i. already referred to. It recurs

also in Isaiah (xlvi. 3, 4), Even to hoar hairs will I carry you, and I

have made and I will bear, yea, I will carry, and will deliver'; and in

Hosea (xi. 3), I taught Ephraim to go; I took them on My arms.'

The image beautifully suggests the thought of the favourite child

riding high and happy on the strong shoulder, which lifts it above

rough places and miry ways. The prose reality is: My grace is

sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'

The Cross carries those who carry it. They who carry God in their

hearts are carried by God through all the long pilgrimage of life.

Because they are thus upheld by a strength not their own, they shall

run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint,' and though

marches be long and limbs strained, they shall go from strength to

strength till every one of them appears before God in Zion.'

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AT THE BUSH'

.. The goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.'--DEUT. xxxiii. 16.

I Think this is the only reference in the Old Testament to that great

vision which underlay Moses' call and Israel's deliverance. It occurs

in what is called the blessing wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed

the children of Israel before his death,' although modern opinion tends

to decide that this hymn is indeed much more recent than the days of

Moses. There seems a peculiar appropriateness in this reference being

put into the mouth of the ancient Lawgiver, for to him even Sinai, with

all its glories, cannot have been so impressive and so formative of his

character as was the vision granted to him when solitary in the

wilderness. It is to be noticed that the characteristic by which God is

designated here never occurs elsewhere than in this one place. It is

intended to intensify the conception of the greatness, and

preciousness, and all-sufficiency of that goodwill.' If it is that of

Him that dwelt in the bush,' it is sure to be all that a man can need.

I need not remind you that the words occur in the blessing pronounced

on Joseph'--that is, the two tribes which represented Joseph--in which

all the greatest material gifts that could be desired by a pastoral

people are first called down upon them, and then the ground of all

these is laid in the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush.' The

blessing--let it come on the head of Joseph.'

So then here, first, is a great thought as to what for us all is the

blessing of blessings--God's goodwill.' Goodwill'-the word, perhaps,

might bear a little stronger rendering. Goodwill' is somewhat tepid. A

man may have a good enough will, and yet no very strong emotion of

favour or delight, and may do nothing to carry his goodwill into

action. But the word that is employed here, and is a common enough one

in Scripture, always carries with it a certain intensity and warmth of

feeling. It is more than goodwill'; it is more than favour'; perhaps

delight' would be nearer the meaning. It implies, too, not only the

inward sentiment of complacency, but also the active purpose of action

in conformity with it, on God's part. Now it needs few words to show

that these two things, which are inseparable, do make the blessing of

blessings for every one of us--the delight, the complacency, of God in

us, and the active purpose of good in God for us. These are the things

that will make a man happy wherever he is.

If I might dwell for a moment upon other scriptural passages, I would

just recall to you, as bringing up very strongly and beautifully the

all-sufficiency and the blessed effects of having this delight and

loving purpose directed towards us like a sunbeam, the various great

things that a chorus of psalmists say that it will do for a man. Here

is one of their triumphant utterances: Thou wilt bless the righteous;

with favour wilt Thou compass him as with a shield.' That crystal

battlement, if I may so vary the figure, is round a man, keeping far

away from him all manner of real evil, and filling his quiet heart as

he stands erect behind the rampart, with the sense of absolute

security. That is one of the blessings that God's favour or goodwill

will secure for us. Again, we read: By Thy favour Thou hast made my

mountain to stand strong.' He that knows himself to be the object of

the divine delight, and who by faith knows himself to be the object of

the divine activity in protection, stands firm, and his purposes will

be carried through, because they will be purposes in accordance with

the divine mind, and nothing has power to shake him. So he that grasps

the hand of God can say, not because of his grasp, but because of the

Hand that he holds, The Lord is at my right hand; I shall not be

greatly moved. By Thy favour Thou hast made our mountain to stand

strong.' And again, in another analogous but yet diversified

representation, we read: In Thee shall we rejoice all the day, and in

Thy favour shall our horn be exalted.' That is the emblem, not only of

victory, but of joyful confidence, and so he who knows himself to have

God for his friend and his helper, can go through the world keeping a

sunny face, whatever the clouds may be, erect and secure, light of

heart and buoyant, holding up his chin above the stormiest waters, and

breasting all difficulties and dangers with a confidence far away from

presumption, because it is the consequence of the realisation of God's

presence. So the goodwill of God is the chiefest good.

Now, if we turn to the remarkable designation of the divine nature

which is here, consider what rivers of strength and of blessedness flow

out of the thought that for each of us the goodwill of Him that dwelt

in the bush' may be our possession.

What does that pregnant designation of God say? That was a strange

shrine for God, that poor, ragged, dry desert bush, with apparently no

sap in its gray stem, prickly with thorns, with no beauty that we

should desire it,' fragile and insignificant, yet it was God's house.'

Not in the cedars of Lebanon, not in the great monarchs of the forest,

but in the forlorn child of the desert did He abide. The goodwill of

Him that dwelt in the bush' may dwell in you and me. Never mind how

small, never mind how sapless, never mind how lightly esteemed among

men, never mind though we make a very poor show by the side of the oaks

of Bashan' or the cedars of Lebanon.' It is all right; the Fire does

not dwell in them. Unto this man will I look, and with him will I

dwell, who is of a humble and a contrite heart, and who trembleth at My

word.' Let no sense of poverty, weakness, unworthiness, ever draw the

faintest film of fear across our confidence, for even with us He will

sojourn. For it is the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' that we

evoke for ours.

Again, what more does that name say? He that dwelt in the bush' filled

it with fire, and it burned and was not consumed.' Now there is good

ground to object to the ordinary interpretation, as if the burning of

the bush which yet remains unconsumed was meant to symbolise Israel,

or, in the New Testament application, the Church which, notwithstanding

all persecution, still remains undestroyed. Our brethren of the

Presbyterian churches have taken the Latin form of the words in the

context for their motto--Nec Tamen Consumebatur. But I venture to think

that that is a mistake; and that what is meant by the symbol is just

what is expressed by the verbal revelation which accompanied it, and

that was this: I AM THAT I AM.' The fire that did not burn out is the

emblem of the divine nature which does not tend to death because it

lives, nor to exhaustion because it energises, nor to emptiness because

it bestows, but after all times is the same; lives by its own energy

and is independent. I am that I have become,'--that is what men have to

say. I am that I once was not, and again once shall not be,' is what

men have to say. I am that I am' is God's name. And this eternal,

ever-living, self-sufficing, absolute, independent, unwearied,

inexhaustible God is the God whose favour is as inexhaustible as

Himself, and eternal as His own being. Therefore the sons of men shall

put their trust beneath the shadow of Thy wings,' and, if they have the

goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush,' will be able to say, Because

Thou livest we shall live also.'

What more does the name say? He that dwelt in the bush' dwelt there in

order to deliver; and, dwelling there, declared I have seen the

affliction of My people, and am come down to deliver them.' So, then,

if the goodwill of that eternal, delivering God is with us, we, too,

may feel that our trivial troubles and our heavy burdens, all the needs

of our prisoned wills and captive souls, are known to Him, and that we

shall have deliverance from them by Him. Brethren, in that name, with

its historical associations, with its deep revelations of the divine

nature, with its large promises of the divine sympathy and help, there

lie surely abundant strengths and consolations for us all. The

goodwill, the delight, of God, and the active help of God, may be ours,

and if these be ours we shall be blessed and strong.

Do not let us forget the place in this blessing on the head of Joseph

which my text holds. It is preceded by an invoking of the precious

things of Heaven, and the precious fruits brought forth by the sun. . .

of the chief things of the ancient mountains, and the precious things

of the lasting hills, and the precious things of the earth and the

fulness thereof.' They are all heaped together in one great mass for

the beloved Joseph. And then, like the golden spire that tops some of

those campaniles in Italian cities, and completes their beauty, above

them all there is set, as the shining apex of all, the goodwill of Him

that dwelt in the bush.' That is more precious than all other precious

things; set last because it is to be sought first; set last as in

building some great structure the top stone is put on last of all; set

last because it gathers all others into itself, secures that all others

shall be ours in the measure in which we need them, and arms us against

all possibilities of evil. So the blessing of blessings is the goodwill

of Him that dwelt in the bush.'

In my text this is an invocation only; but we can go further than that.

You and I can make sure that we have it, if we will. How to secure it?

One of the texts which I have already quoted helps us a little way

along t he road in answer to that question, for it says, Thou, Lord,

wilt bless the righteous. With favour wilt thou compass him as with a

shield.' But it is of little use to tell me that if I am righteous' God

will bless me,' and compass me with favour.' If you will tell me how to

become righteous, you will do me more good. And we have been told how

to be righteous--If a man keep My commandments My Father will love him,

and we will come to him and make our abode with him.' If we knit

ourselves to Jesus Christ, and we can all do that if we like, by faith

that trusts Him, and by love, the child of faith, that obeys Him, and

grows daily more like Him--then, without a doubt, that delight of God

in us, and that active purpose of good in God's mind towards us, will

assuredly be ours; and on no other terms.

So, dear brethren, the upshot of my homily is just this--Men may strive

and scheme, and wear their finger-nails down to the quick, to get some

lesser good, and fail after all. The greatest good is certainly ours by

that easy road which, however hard it may be otherwise, is made easy

because it is so certain to bring us to what we want. Holiness is the

condition of God's delight in us, and a genuine faith in Christ, and

the love which faith evokes, are the conditions. So it is a very simple

matter You never can be sure of getting the lower good You can be quite

sure of getting the highest. You never can be certain that the precious

things of the earth and the fulness thereof will be yours, or that if

they were, they would be so very precious; but you can be quite sure

that the goodwill of Him that dwelt in the bush' may lie like light

upon your hearts, and be strength to your limbs.

And so I commend to you the words of the Apostle, Wherefore we labour

that, whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.' To

minister to God's delight is the highest glory of man. To have the

favour of Him that dwelt in the bush resting upon us is the highest

blessing for man. He will say Well done! good and faithful servant.'

The Lord taketh pleasure'--wonderful as it sounds--in them that fear

Him, in them that hope in His mercy,' and that, hoping in His mercy,

live as He would have them live.

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SHOD FOR THE ROAD

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy

strength be.'--DEUT. xxxiii. 25.

There is a general correspondence between those blessings wherewith

Moses blessed the tribes of Israel before his death, and the

circumstances and territory of each tribe in the promised land. The

portion of Asher, in whose blessing the words of our text occurs, was

partly the rocky northern coast and partly the fertile lands stretching

to the base of the Lebanon. In the inland part of their territory they

cultivated large olive groves, the produce of which was trodden out in

great rock-hewn cisterns. So the clause before my text is a benediction

upon that industry--'let him dip his foot in oil.' And then the

metaphor naturally suggested by the mention of the foot is carried on

into the next words, Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' the tribe

being located upon rocky sea-coast, having rough roads to travel, and

so needing to be well shod. The substance, then, of that promise seems

to be--strength adequate to, and unworn by, exercise; while the second

clause, though not altogether plain, seems to put a somewhat similar

idea in unmetaphorical shape. As thy days, so shall thy strength be,'

probably means the promise of power that grows with growing years.

So, then, we have first that thought that God gives us an equipment of

strength proportioned to our work,--shoes fit for our road. God does

not turn people out to scramble over rough mountains with thin-soled

boots on; that is the plain English of the words. When an Alpine

climber is preparing to go away into Switzerland for rock work, the

first thing he does is to get a pair of strong shoes, with plenty of

iron nails in the soles of them. So Asher had to be shod for his rough

roads, and so each of us may be sure that if God sends us on stony

paths He will provide us with strong shoes, and will not send us out on

any journey for which He does not equip us well.

There are no difficulties to be found in any path of duty, for which he

that is called to tread it is not prepared by Him that sent him.

Whatsoever may be the road, our equipment is calculated for it, and is

given to us from Him that has appointed it.

Is there not a suggestion here, too, as to the sort of travelling we

may expect to have? An old saying tells us that we do not go to heaven

in silver slippers, and the reason is because the road is rough. The

primrose way' leads somewhere else, and it may be walked on

delicately.' But if we need shoes of iron and brass, we may pretty well

guess the kind of road we have before us. If a man is equipped with

such coverings on his feet, depend upon it that there will be use for

them before he gets to the end of his day's journey. The thickest sole

will make the easiest travelling over rocky roads. So be quite sure of

this, that if God gives to us certain endowments and equipments which

are only calculated for very toilsome paths, the roughness of the road

will match the stoutness of the shoes.

And see what He does give. See the provision which is made for patience

and strength, for endurance and courage, in all the messages of His

mercy, in all the words of His love, in all the powers of His Gospel,

and then say whether that looks as if we should have an easy life of it

on our way home. Those two ships that went away a while ago upon the

brave, and, as some people thought, desperate task of finding the North

Pole--any one that looked upon them as they lay in Portsmouth Roads,

might know that it was no holiday cruise they were meant for. The

thickness of the sides, the strength of the cordage, the massiveness of

the equipment, did not look like pleasure-sailing.

And so, dear brethren, if we think of all that is given to us in God's

Gospel in the way of stimulus and encouragement, and exhortation, and

actual communication of powers, we may calculate, from the abundance of

the resources, how great will be the strain upon us before we come to

the end, and our feet stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem.' Go into

some of the great fortresses in continental countries, and you will

find the store-rooms full of ammunition and provisions; bread enough

and biscuits enough, as it seems, for half the country, laid up there,

and a deep well somewhere or other in the courtyard. What does that

mean? It means fighting, that is what it means. So if we are brought

into this strong pavilion, so well provisioned, so massively fortified

and defended, that means that we shall need all the strength that is to

be found in those thick walls, and all the sustenance that is to be

found in those gorged magazines, and all the refreshment that is to be

drawn from that free, and full, and inexhaustible fountain, before the

battle is over and the victory won. Depend upon it, the promise Thy

shoes shall be iron and brass.' means, Thy road shall be rocky and

flinty'; and so it is.

And yet, thank God! whilst it is true that it is very hard and very

difficult for many of us, and hard and difficult--even if without the

very'--for us all, it is also true that we have the adequate provision

sufficient for all our necessities--and far more than sufficient! It is

a poor compliment to the strength that He gives to us to say that it is

enough to carry us through. God does not deal out His gifts to people

with such an economical correspondence to necessities as that. There is

always a wide margin. More than we can ask, more than we can think,

more than we can need is given us.

If He were to deal with us as men often deal with one another, asking

us, Well, how much do you want? cannot you do with a little less? there

is the exact quantity that you need for your support'--if you got your

bread by weight and your water by measure, it would be a very poor

affair. See how He actually does--He says, Child, there is Mine own

strength for you'; and we think that we honour Him when we say, God has

given us enough for our necessities!' Rather the old word is always

true: So they did eat and were filled; and they took up of the

fragments that remained seven baskets-full,' and after they were

satisfied and replete with the provision, there was more at the end

than when they began.

That suggests another possible thought to be drawn from this promise,

namely, that it assures not only of strength adequate to the

difficulties and perils of the journey, but also of a strength which is

not worn out by use.

The portion' of Asher was the rocky sea-coast. The sharp, jagged rocks

would cut to pieces anything made of leather long before the day's

march was over; but the travellers have their feet shod with metal, and

the rocks which they have to stumble over will only strike fire from

their shoes. They need not step timidly for fear of wearing them out;

but, wherever they have to march, may go with full confidence that

their shoeing will not fail them. A wise general looks after that part

of his soldiers' outfit with special care, knowing that if it gives

out, all the rest is of no use. So our Captain provides us with an

inexhaustible strength, to which we may fully trust. We shall not

exhaust it by any demands that we can make upon it. We shall only

brighten it up, like the nails in a well-used shoe, the heads of which

are polished by stumbling and scrambling over rocky roads.

So we may be bold in the march, and draw upon our stock of strength to

the utmost. There is no fear that it will fail us. We may put all our

force into our work, we shall not weaken the power which by reason of

use is exercised,' not exhausted. For the grace which Christ gives us

to serve Him, being divine, is subject to no weariness, and neither

faints nor fails. The bush that burned unconsumed is a type of that

Infinite Being who works unexhausted, and lives undying, after all

expenditure is rich, after all pouring forth is full. And of His

strength we partake.

Whensoever a man puts forth an effort of any kind whatever--when I

speak, when I lift my hand, when I run, when I think-there is waste of

muscular tissue. Some of my strength goes in the act, and thus every

effort means expenditure and diminution of force. Hence weariness that

needs sleep, waste that needs food, languor that needs rest. We belong

to an order of being in which work is death, in regard to our physical

nature; but our spirits may lay hold of God, and enter into an order of

things in which work is not death, nor effort exhaustion, nor is there

loss of power in the expenditure of power.

That sounds strange, and yet it is not strange. Think of that electric

light which is made by directing a strong stream upon two small pieces

of carbon. As the electricity strikes upon these and turns their

blackness into a fiery blaze, it eats away their substance while it

changes them into light. But there is an arrangement in the lamp by

which a fresh surface is continually being brought into the path of the

beam, and so the light continues without wavering and blazes on. The

carbon is our human nature, black and dull in itself; the electric beam

is the swift energy of God, which makes us light in the Lord.' For the

one, decay is the end of effort; for the other, there is none. Though

our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.'

Though we belong to the perishing order of nature by our bodily frame,

we belong to the undecaying realm of grace by the spirit that lays hold

upon God. And if our work weary us, as it must do so long as we

continue here, yet in the deepest sanctuary of our being, our strength

is greatened by exercise. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass.' Thy

raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these

forty years.' Stand, therefore, having your feet shod with the

preparedness of the Gospel of peace.'

But this is not all. There is an advance even upon these great promises

in the closing words. That second clause of our text says more than the

first one. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass,' that promises us powers

and provision adapted to, and unexhausted by, the weary pilgrimage and

rough road of life. But as thy days, so shall thy strength be,' says

even more than that. The meaning of the word rendered strength' in our

version is very doubtful, and most modern translators are inclined to

render it rest.' But if we adhere to the translation of our version, we

get a forcible and relevant promise, which fits on well to the previous

clause, understood as it has been in my previous remarks. The usual

understanding of the words is strength proportioned to thy day,' an

idea which we have found already suggested by the previous clause. But

that explanation rests on, or at any rate derives support from, the

common misquotation of the words. They are not, as we generally hear

them quoted, As thy day, so shall thy strength be,'--but day' is in the

plural, and that makes a great difference. As thy days, so shall thy

strength be,' that is to say: the two sums--of thy days' and of thy

strength'--keep growing side by side, the one as fast as the other and

no faster. The days increase. Well, what then? The strength increases

too. As I said, we are allied to two worlds. According to the law of

one of them, the outer world of physical life, we soon reach the summit

of human strength. For a little while it is true, even in the life of

nature, that our power grows with our days. But we soon reach the

watershed, and then the opposite comes to be true. Down, steadily down,

we go. With diminishing power, with diminishing vitality, with a dimmer

eye, with an obtuser ear, with a slower-beating heart, with a feebler

frame, we march on and on to our grave. As thy days, so shall thy

weakness be,' is the law for all of us mature men and women in regard

to our outward life.

But, dear brethren, we may be emancipated from that dreary law in

regard to the true life of our spirits, and instead of growing weaker

as we grow older, we may and we should grow stronger. We may be and we

should be moving on a course that has no limit to its advance. We may

be travelling on a shining path through the heavens, that has no

noon-tide height from which it must slowly and sadly decline, but tends

steadily and for ever upwards, nearer and nearer to the very fountain

itself of heavenly radiance. The path of the just is as the shining

light, which shineth more and more till the noon-tide of the day.' But

the reality surpasses even that grand thought, for it discloses to us

an endless approximation to an infinite beauty, and an ever-growing

possession of never exhausted fulness, as the law for the progress of

all Christ's servants. The life of each of us may and should be

continual accession and increase of power through all the days here,

through all the ages beyond. Why? Because the life which I live, I live

by the faith of the Son of God.' Christ liveth in me. It is not my

strength that grows, so much as God's strength in me which is given

more abundantly as the days roll. It is so given on one condition. If

my faith has laid hold of the infinite, the exhaustless, the immortal

energy of God, unless there is something fearfully wrong about me, I

shall be becoming purer, nobler, wiser, more observant of His will,

gentler, liker Christ, every way fitter for His service, and for larger

service, as the days increase.

Those of us who have reached middle life, or perhaps gone a little over

the watershed, ought to have this experience as our own in a very

distinct degree. The years that are past ought to have drawn us

somewhat away from our hot pursuing after earthly and perishable

things. They should have added something to the clearness and

completeness of our perception of the deep simplicity of God's gospel.

They should have tightened our hold and increased our possession of

Christ, and unfolded more and more of His all-sufficiency. They should

have enriched us with memories of God's loving care, and lighted all

the sky behind with a glow which is reflected on the path before us,

and kindles calm confidence in His unfailing goodness. They should have

given us power and skill for the conflicts that yet remain, as the Red

Indians believe that the strength of every defeated and scalped enemy

passes into his conqueror's arm. They should have given force to our

better nature, and weakening, progressive weakening, to our worse. They

should have rooted us more firmly and abidingly in Him from whom all

our power comes, and so have given us more and fuller supplies of His

exhaustless and ever-flowing might.

So it may be with us if we abide in Him, without whom we are nothing,

but partaking of whose strength the weakest shall be as David, and

David as an angel of God.'

If for us, drawing nearer to the end is drawing nearer to the light,

our faces will be brightened more and more with that light which we

approach, and our path will be as the shining light which shines more

and more unto the noon-tide of the day,' because we are closer to the

very fountain of heavenly radiance, and growingly bathed and flooded

with the outgoings of His glory. As thy days, so shall thy strength

be.'

The promise ought to be true for us all. It is true for all who use the

things that are freely given to them of God. And whilst thus it is the

law for the devout life here, its most glorious fulfilment remains for

the life beyond. There each new moment shall bring new strength, and

growing millenniums but add fresh vigour to our immortal life. Here the

unresting beat of the waves of the sea of time gnaws away the bank and

shoal whereon we stand, but there each roll of the great ocean of

eternity shall but spread new treasures at our feet and add new acres

to our immortal heritage. The oldest angels,' says Swedenborg, look the

youngest.' When life is immortal, the longer it lasts the stronger it

becomes, and so the spirits that have stood for countless days before

His throne, when they appear to human eyes, appear as--young men

clothed in long white garments,'--full of unaging youth and energy that

cannot wane. So, whilst in the flesh we must obey the law of decay, the

spirit may be subject to this better law of life, and while the outward

man perisheth, the inward man be renewed day by day.' Even the youths

shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall; but

they that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.'

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A DEATH IN THE DESERT

So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab,

according to the word of the Lord. 6. And he buried him in a valley in

the land of Moab, . . . but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this

day.'--DEUT. xxxiv. 5, 6.

A fitting end to such a life! The great law-giver and leader had been

all his days a lonely man; and now, surrounded by a new generation, and

all the old familiar faces vanished, he is more solitary than ever. He

had lived alone with God, and it was fitting that alone with God he

should die.

How the silent congregation must have watched, as, alone, with natural

strength unabated,' he breasted the mountain, and went up to be seen no

more! With dignified reticence our chapter tells us no details. He died

there,' in that dreary solitude, and in some cleft he was buried, and

no man knows where. The lessons of that solitary death and unknown tomb

may best be learned by contrast with another death and another

grave--those of the Leader of the New Covenant, the Law-giver and

Deliverer from a worse bondage, and Guide into a better Canaan, the Son

who was faithful over His own house, as Moses was faithful in all his

house, as a servant.' That lonely and forgotten grave among the savage

cliffs was in keeping with the whole character and work of him who lay

there.

Here,--here's his place, where meteors shoot, clouds form,

Lightnings are loosened,

Stars come and go! Let joy break with the storm,

Peace let the dew send!

Lofty designs must close in like effects;

Loftily lying,

Leave him--still loftier than the world suspects,

Living and dying.'

Contrast that grave with the sepulchre in the garden where Jesus lay,

close by a city wall, guarded by foes, haunted by troops of weeping

friends, visited by a great light of angel faces. The one was hidden

and solitary, as teaching the loneliness and mystery of death; the

other revealed light in the darkness, and companionship in the

loneliness. The one faded from men's memory because it was nothing to

any man; no impulses, nor hopes, nor gifts, could come from it. The

other forever draws hearts and memories, because in it was wrought out

the victory in which all our hopes are rooted. An endured cross, an

empty grave, an occupied throne, are as the threefold cord on which all

our hopes hang. Moses was solitary as God's servant in life and death,

and oblivion covered his mountain grave. Christ's delights were with

the sons of men.' He lived among them, and all men know his sepulchre

to this day.'

I. Note, then, first, as a lesson gathered from this lonely death, the

penalty of transgression.

One of the great truths which the old law and ordinances given by Moses

were intended to burn in on the conscience of the Jew, and through him

on the conscience of the world, was that indissoluble connection

between evil done and evil suffered, which reaches its highest

exemplification in the death which is the wages of sin.' And just as

some men that have invented instruments for capital punishment have

themselves had to prove the sharpness of their own axe, so the

lawgiver, whose message it had been to declare, the soul that sinneth

it shall die,' had himself to go up alone to the mountain-top to

receive in his own person the exemplification of the law that had been

spoken by his own lips. He sinned when, in a moment of passion (with

many palliations and excuses), he smote the rock that he was bidden to

address, and forgot therein, and in his angry words to the rebels, that

he was only an instrument in the divine hand. It was a momentary

wavering in a hundred and twenty years of obedience. It was one failure

in a life of self-abnegation and suppression. The stern sentence came.

People say, A heavy penalty for a small offence.' Yes; but an offence

of Moses could not be a small offence.' Noblesse oblige! The higher a

man rises in communion with God, and the more glorious the message and

office which are put into his hands, the more intolerable in him is the

slightest deflection from the loftiest level. A splash of mud, that

would never be seen on a navvy's clothes, stains the white satin of a

bride or the embroidered garment of a noble. And so a little sin done

by a loftily endowed and inspired man ceases to be small.

Nor are we to regard that momentary lapse only from the outside and the

surface. One little mark under the armpit of a plague-sufferer tells

the physician that the fatal disease is there. A tiny leaf above ground

may tell that, deep below, lurks the root of a poison plant. That

little deflection, coming as it did at the beginning of the resumption

of his functions by the Lawgiver after seven-and-thirty years of

comparative abeyance, and on his first encounter with the new

generation that he had to lead, was a very significant indication that

his character had begun to yield and suffer from the strain that had

been put upon it; and that, in fact, he was scarcely fit for the

responsibilities that the new circumstances brought. So the penalty was

not so disproportionate to the fault as it may seem.

And was the penalty such a very great one? Do you think that a man who

had been toiling for eighty years at a very thankless task would

consider it a very severe punishment to be told, Go home and take your

wages'? It did not mean the withdrawal of the divine favour. Moses and

Aaron among his priests. . . . Thou wast a God that forgavest them,

though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' The penalty of a

forgiven sin is never hard to bear, and the penalty of a forgiven sin

is very often punctually and mercifully exacted.

But still we are not to ignore the fact that this lonely death, with

which we are now concerned, is of the nature of a penal infliction. And

so it stands forth in consonance with the whole tone of the Mosaic

teaching. I admit, of course, that the mere physical fact of the

separation between body and spirit is simply the result of natural law.

But that is not the death that you and I know. Death as we know it, the

ugly thing that flings its long shadows across all life, and that comes

armed with terrors for conscience and spirit, is the wages of sin,' and

is only experienced by men who have transgressed the law of God. So far

Moses in his life and in his death carries us--that no transgression

escapes the appropriate punishment; that the smallest sin has in it the

seeds of mortal consequences; that the loftiest saint does not escape

the law of retribution.

And no further does Moses with his Law and his death carry us. But we

turn to the other death. And there we find the confirmation, in an

eminent degree, of that Law, and yet the repeal of it. It is confirmed

and exhausted in Jesus Christ. His death was the wages of sin.' Whose?

Not His. Mine, yours, every man's. And because He died, surrounded by

men, outside the old city wall, pure and sinless in Himself, He therein

both said Amen' to the Law of Moses, and swept it away. For all the

sins of the world were laid upon His head, He bore the curse for us

all, and has emptied the bitter cup which men's transgressions have

mingled. Therefore the solitary death in the desert proclaims the wages

of sin'; that death outside the city wall proclaims the gift of God,'

which is eternal life.'

II. Another of the lessons of our incident is the withdrawal, by a hard

fate, of the worker on the very eve of the completion of his work.

For all these forty years there had gleamed before the fixed and

steadfast spirit of the sorely tried leader one hope that he never

abandoned, and that was that he might look upon and enter into the

blessed land which God had promised. And now he stands on the heights

of Moab. Half a dozen miles onwards, as the crow flies, and his feet

would tread its soil. He lifts his eyes, and away up yonder, in the far

north, he sees the rolling uplands of Gilead, and across the deep gash

where the Jordan runs, he catches a glimpse of the blue hills of

Naphtali or of Galilee, and the central mountain masses of Ephraim and

Manasseh, where Ebal and Gerizim lift their heads; and then, further

south, the stony summits of the Judaean hills, where Jerusalem and

Bethlehem lie, and, through some gap in the mountains, a gleam as of

sunshine upon armour tells where the ocean is. And then his eye falls

upon the waterless plateau of the South, and at his feet the fertile

valley of Jordan, with Jericho glittering amongst its palm trees like a

diamond set in emeralds, and on some spur of the lower hill bounding

the plain, the little Zoar. This was the land which the Lord had

promised to the fathers, for which he had been yearning, and to which

all his work had been directed all these years; and now he is to die,

as my text puts it, with such pathetic emphasis, there in Moab,' and to

have no part in the fair inheritance.

It is the lot of all epoch-making men, of all great constructive and

reforming geniuses, whether in the Church or in the world, that they

should toil at a task, the full issues of which will not be known until

their heads are laid low in the dust. But if, on the one hand, that

seems hard, on the other hand there is the compensation of the vision

of the future and all the wonder that shall be,' which is granted many

a time to the faithful worker ere he closes his eyes. But that is not

the fate of epoch-making and great men only; it is the law for our

little lives. If these are worth anything, they are constructed on a

scale too large to bring out all their results here and now. It is easy

for a man to secure immediate consequences of an earthly kind; easy

enough for him to make certain that he shall have the fruit of his

toil. But quick returns mean small profits; and an unfinished life that

succeeds in nothing may be far better than a completed one, that has

realised all its shabby purposes and accomplished all its petty

desires. Do you, my brother, live for the far-off; and seek not for the

immediate issues and fruits that the world can give, but be contented

to be of those whose toil waits for eternity to disclose its

significance. Better a half-finished temple than a finished pigstye or

huckster's shop. Better a life, the beginning of much and the

completion of nothing, than a life directed to and hitting an earthly

aim. He that soweth to the spirit shall of the Spirit reap life

everlasting,' and his harvest and garner are beyond the grave.

III. Again, notice here the lesson of the solitude and mystery of

death.

Moses dies alone, with no hand to clasp his, none to close his eyes;

but God's finger does it. The outward form of his death is but putting

into symbol and visibility the awful characteristics of that last

moment for us all. However closely we have been twined with others,

each of us has to unclasp dear hands, and make that journey through the

narrow, dark tunnel by himself. We live alone in a very real sense, but

we each have to die as if there were not another human being in the

whole universe but only ourselves. But the solitude may be a solitude

with God. Up there, alone with the stars and the sky and the

everlasting rocks and menacing death, Moses had for companion the

supporting God. That awful path is not too desolate and lonely to be

trodden if we tread it with Him.

Moses' lonely death leads to a society yonder. If you refer to the

thirty-second chapter you will find that, when he was summoned to the

mountain, God said to him, Die in the mount whither thou goest up, and

be gathered to thy people.' He was to be buried there, up amongst the

rocks of Moab, and no man was ever to visit his sepulchre to drop a

tear over it. How, then, was he gathered to his people'? Surely only

thus, that, dying in the desert alone, he opened his eyes in the City,'

surrounded by solemn troops and sweet societies' of those to whom he

was kindred. So the solitude of a moment leads on to blessed and

eternal companionship.

So far the death of Moses carries us. What does the other death say?

Moses had none but God with him when he died. There is a drearier

desolation than that, and Jesus Christ proved it when He cried, My God,

My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' That was solitude indeed, and in

that hour of mysterious, and to us unfathomable, desertion and misery,

the lonely Christ sounded a depth, of which the lawgiver in His death

but skimmed the surface. Christ was parted from God in His death,

because He bore on Him the sins that separate us from our Father, and

in order that none of us may ever need to tread that dark passage

alone, but may be able to say, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with

me'--Thou, who hast trodden every step in its rough and dreary path,

uncheered by the presence which cheers us and millions more. Christ

died that we might live. He died alone that, when we come to die, we

may hold His hand and the solitude may vanish.

Then, again, our incident teaches us the mystery that wrapped death to

that ancient world, of which we may regard that unknown and forgotten

sepulchre as the visible symbol. Deep darkness lies over the Old

Testament in reference to what is beyond the grave, broken by gleams of

light, when the religious consciousness asserted its indestructibility,

in spite of all appearance to the contrary; but never growing to the

brightness of serene and continuous assurance of immortal life and

resurrection. We may conceive that mysteriousness as set forth for us

by that grave that was hidden away in the defiles of Moab, unvisited

and uncared for by any.

We turn to the other grave, and there, as the stone is rolled away, and

the rising sunshine of the Easter morning pours into it, we have a

visible symbol of the life and immortality which Jesus Christ then

brought to light by His Gospel. The buried grave speaks of the

inscrutable mystery that wrapped the future: the open sepulchre

proclaims the risen Lord of life, and the sunlight certainty of future

blessedness which we owe to Him. Death is solitary no more, though it

be lonely as far as human companionship is concerned; and a mystery no

more, though what is beyond is hidden from our view, and none but

Christ has ever returned to tell the tale, and He has told us little

but the fact that we shall live with Him.

We rejoice that we have not to turn to a grave hid amongst the hills

where our dead Leader lies, but to an open sepulchre by the city wall

in the sunshine, from whence has come forth the ever-living Captain of

our salvation.'

IV. The last lesson is the uselessness of a dead leader to a generation

with new conflicts.

Commentators have spent a great deal of ingenuity in trying to assign

reasons why God concealed the grave of Moses. The text does not say

that God concealed it at all. The ignorance of the place of his

sepulchre does not seem to have been part of the divine design, but

simply a consequence of the circumstances of his death, and of the fact

that he lay in an enemy's land, and that they had had something else to

do than go to look for the grave of a dead commander. They had to

conquer the land, and a living Joshua was what they wanted, not a dead

Moses.

So we may learn from this how easily the gaps fill. Thirty days'

mourning,' and says my text, with almost a bitter touch,' so the days

of mourning for Moses were ended.' A month of it, that was all; and

then everybody turned to the new man that was appointed for the new

work. God has many tools in His tool-chest, and He needs them all

before the work is done. Joshua could no more have wielded Moses' rod

than Moses could have wielded Joshua's sword. The one did his work, and

was laid aside. New circumstances required a new type of character--the

smaller man better fitted for the rougher work. And so it always is.

Each generation, each period, has its own men that do some little part

of the work which has to be done, and then drop it and hand over the

task to others. The division of labour is the multiplication of joy at

the end, and he that soweth and he that reapeth rejoice together.' But

whilst the one grave tells us, This man served his generation by the

will of God, and was laid asleep and saw corruption,' the other grave

proclaims One whom all generations need, whose work is comprehensive

and complete, who dies never. He liveth and was dead, and is alive for

evermore.' Christ, and Christ alone, can never be antiquated. This day

requires Him, and has in Him as complete an answer to all its

necessities as if no other generation had ever possessed Him. He liveth

for ever, and for ever is the Shepherd of men.

So Aaron dies and is buried on Hor, and Moses dies and is buried on

Pisgah, and Joshua steps into his place, and, in turn, he disappears.

The one eternal Word of God worked through them all, and came at last

Himself in human flesh to be the Everlasting Deliverer, Redeemer,

Founder of the Covenant, Lawgiver, Guide through the wilderness,

Captain of the warfare, and all that the world or a single soul can

need until the last generation has crossed the flood, and the wandering

pilgrims are gathered in the land of their inheritance. The dead Moses

pre-supposes and points to the living Christ. Let us take Him for our

all-sufficing and eternal Guide.

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THE BOOK OF JOSHUA

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THE NEW LEADER'S COMMISSION

Now after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord it came to pass,

that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister,

saying, 2. Moses My servant is dead: now therefore arise, go over this

Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to

them, even to the children of Israel. 3. Every place that the sole of

your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto

Moses. 4. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great

river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the

great sea, toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast. 5.

There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of

thy life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail

thee, nor forsake thee. 6. Be strong and of a good courage; for unto

this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land which I sware

unto their fathers to give them. 7. Only be thou strong and very

courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law,

which Moses My servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right

hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

8. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou

shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do

according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy

way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success. 9. Have not I

commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither

be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou

goest. 10. Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, saying,

11. Pass through the host, and command the people, saying, Prepare you

victuals; for within three days ye shall pass over this Jordan, to go

in to possess the land, which the Lord your God giveth you to possess

it.'--JOSHUA i. 1-11.

The closest connection exists between Deuteronomy and Joshua. The

narrative may be read as running on without a break. It turns away from

the lonely grave up on the mountain to the bustling camp and the new

leader. No man is indispensable. God's work goes on uninterrupted. The

instruments are changed, but the Master-hand is the same, and lays one

tool aside and takes another out of the tool-chest as He will. Moses is

dead,--what then? Does his death paralyse the march of the tribes? No;

it is but the ground for the ringing command, Therefore arise, go over

this Jordan.' The immediate installation of his successor, and the

uninterrupted continuance of the advance, do not mean that Moses is not

honoured or is forgotten, for the narrative lovingly links his

honorific title, the servant of the Lord,' with the mention of his

death; and God Himself does the same, for he is thrice referred to in

the divine command to Joshua, as the recipient of the promise of the

conquest, as the example of the highest experience of God's

all-sufficing companionship, and as the medium by which Israel received

the law. Joshua steps into the empty place, receives the same great

promise, is assured of the same Presence, and is to obey the same law.

The change of leaders is great, but nothing else is changed; and even

it is not so great as faint hearts in their sorrow are apt to think,

for the real Leader lives, and Moses and Joshua alike are but the

transmitters of His orders and His aids to Israel.

The first command given to Joshua was a trial of his faith, for Jordan

was in flood' (Joshua iii. 15),--and how was that crowd to get across,

when fords were impassable and ferry-boats were wanting, to say nothing

of the watchful eyes that were upon them from the other bank? To cross

a stream in the face of the enemy is a ticklish operation, even for

modern armies; what must it have been, then, for Joshua and his horde?

Not a hint is given him as to the means by which the crossing is to be

made possible. He has Jehovah's command to do it, and Jehovah's promise

to be with him, and that is to be enough. We too have sometimes to face

undertakings which we cannot see how to carry through; but if we do see

that the path is one appointed by God, and will boldly tread it, we may

be quite sure that, when we come to what at present seems like a

mountain wall across it, we shall find that the glen opens as we

advance, and that there is a way,--narrow, perhaps, and dangerous, but

practicable. One step enough for me' should be our motto. We may trust

God not to command impossibilities, nor to lead us into a cul de sac.

The promise to Moses (Deut. ii. 24) is repeated almost verbally in

verse 4. The boundaries of the land are summarily given as from the

wilderness' in the south to this Lebanon' in the north, and from the

Euphrates in the east to the Mediterranean in the west. The land of the

Hittites' is not found in the original passage in Deuteronomy, and it

seems to be a designation of the territory between Lebanon and the

Euphrates, which we now know to have been the seat of the northern

Hittites, while the southern branch was planted round Hebron and the

surrounding district. But these wide boundaries were not attained till

late in the history, and were not long retained. Did the promise, then,

fail? No, for it, like all the promises, was contingent on conditions,

and Israel's unfaithfulness cut short its extent of territory. We, too,

fail to possess all the land destined for us. Our charter is much wider

than our actual wealth. God gives more than we take, and we are content

to occupy but a corner of the broad land which He has given us. In like

manner Joshua did not realise to the full the following promise of

uniform victory, but was defeated at Ai and elsewhere. The reason was

the same,--the faithlessness of the people. Unbelief and sin turn a

Samson into a weakling, and make Israel flee before the ranks of the

Philistines.

The great encouragement given to Joshua in entering on his hard and

perilous enterprise is twice repeated here: As I was with Moses, so

will I be with thee.' Did Joshua remember how, nearly forty years

since, he had fronted the mob of cowards with the very same assurance,

and how the answer had been a shower of stones? The cowards are all

dead,--will their sons believe the assurance now? If we do believe that

God is with us, we shall be ready to cross Jordan in flood, and to meet

the enemies that are waiting on the other bank. If we do not, we shall

not dare greatly, nor succeed in what we attempt. The small successes

of material wealth and gratified ambition may be ours, but for all the

higher duties and nobler conflicts that become a man, the condition of

achievement and victory is steadfast faith in God's presence and help.

That assurance--which we may all have if we cling to Jesus, in whom God

comes to be with every believing soul--is the only basis on which the

command to Joshua, thrice repeated, can wisely or securely be rested.

It is mockery to say to a man conscious of weakness, and knowing that

there are evils which must surely come, and evils which may possibly

come, against which he is powerless, Don't be afraid' unless you can

show him good reason why he need not be. And there is only one reason

which can still reasonable dread in a human heart that has to front all

the ills that flesh is heir to,' and sees behind them all the grim form

of death. He ought to be afraid, unless--unless what? Unless he has

heard and taken into his inmost soul the Voice that said to Joshua, I

will not fail thee, nor forsake thee: be strong and of a good courage,'

or, still more sweet and peace-bringing, the Voice that said to the

frightened crew of the fishing-boat in the storm and the darkness,' It

is I; be not afraid.' If we know that Christ is with us, it is wise to

be strong and courageous; if we are meeting the tempest alone, the best

thing we can do is to fear, for the fear may drive us to seek for His

help, and He ever stretches out His hand to him who is afraid, as he

ought to be, when he feels the cold water rising above his knees, and

by his very fear is driven to faith, and cries, Lord, save; I perish!'

Courage that does not rest on Christ's presence is audacity rather than

courage, and is sure to collapse, like a pricked bladder, when the

sharp point of a real peril comes in contact with it. If we sit down

and reckon the forces that we have to oppose to the foes that we are

sure to meet, we shall find ourselves unequal to the fight, and, if we

are wise, shall send the ambassage' of a humble desire to the great

King, who will come to our help with His all-conquering powers. Then,

and only then, shall we be safe in saying,' I will not fear what man

can do unto me, or devils either,' when we have said,' In God have I

put my trust,' and have heard Him answering, I will not fail thee, nor

forsake thee.

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THE CHARGE TO THE SOLDIER OF THE LORD

Only be then strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do

according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded thee. . .

that thou mayest prosper wheresoever thou goest. 8. This book of the

law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shall meditate therein

day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is

written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then

thou shalt have good success.'--JOSHUA i. 7, 8.

This is the central portion of the charge given to the successor of

Moses. Joshua was a very small man in comparison with his predecessor.

He was no prophet nor constructive genius; he was not capable of the

heights of communion and revelation which the lofty spirit of Moses was

able to mount. He was only a plain, fiery soldier, with energy, swift

decision, promptitude, self-command, and all the military virtues in

the highest degree. The one thing that he needed was to be strong and

courageous'; and over and over again in this chapter you will find that

injunction pealed into his ears. He is the type of the militant servant

of the Lord, and the charge to him embodies the duties of all such.

I. We have here the duty of courageous strength.

Christianity has altered the perspective of human virtues, has thrown

the gentler ones into prominence altogether unknown before, and has

dimmed the brilliancy of the old heroic type of character; but it has

not struck those virtues out of its list. Whilst the perspective is

altered, there is as much need in the lowliest Christian life for the

loftiest heroism as ever there was. For in no mere metaphor, but in

grim earnest, all Christian progress is conflict, and we have to fight,

not only with the evils that are within, but, if we would be true to

the obligations of our profession and loyal to the commands of our

Master, we have to take our part in the great campaign which He has

inaugurated and is ever carrying on against every abuse and oppression,

iniquity and sin, that grinds down the world and makes our brethren

miserable and servile. So, then, in these words we have directions in

regard to a side of the Christian character, indispensable to-day as

ever, and the lack of which cannot be made up for by any amount of

sweet and contemplative graces.

Jesus Christ is the type of both. The Conqueror of Canaan and the

Redeemer of the world bear the same name. The Jesus whom we trust was a

Joshua. And let us learn the lesson that neither the conqueror of the

typical and material land of promise nor the Redeemer who has won the

everlasting heaven for our portion could do their work without the

heroic side of human excellence being manifestly developed. Do you

remember He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem'? Do you

remember that the Apostle whom a hasty misconception has thought of as

the gentlest of the Twelve, because he had most to say about love, is

the Apostle that more emphatically than any other rings into our ears

over and over again the thought of the Christ, militant and victorious,

the Hero as well as the patient Sufferer, the Captain of our

salvation'? And so let us recognise how both the gentler and the

stronger graces, the pacific and the warlike side of human excellence,

have their highest development in Jesus Christ, and learn that the

firmest strength must be accompanied with the tenderest love and

swathed in meekest gentleness. As another Apostle has it in his

pregnant, brief injunctions, ringing and laconic like a general's word

of command, Quit you like men I be strong! let all your deeds be done

in love!' Braid the two things together, for the mightiest strength is

the love that conquers hate, and the only love that is worthy of a man

is the love that is strong to contend and to overcome.

Be strong.' Then strength is a duty; then weakness is a sin. Then the

amount of strength that we possess and wield is regulated by ourselves.

We have our hands on the sluice. We may open it to let the whole full

tide run in, or we may close it till a mere dribble reaches us. For the

strength which is strength, and not merely weakness in a fever, is a

strength derived, and ours because derived. The Apostle gives the

complete version of the exhortation when he says: Finally, my

brethren,' that Omega of command which is the Alpha of performance, be

strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' Let Christ's

strength in. Open the heart wide that it may come. Keep yourself in

continual touch with God, the fountain of all power. Trust is strength,

because trust touches the Rock of Ages.

For this reason the commandment to be strong and of good courage is in

the text based upon this: As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee.

I will not fail thee nor forsake thee.' Our strength depends on

ourselves, because our strength is the fruit of our faith. And if we

live with Him, grasping His hand and, in the realising consciousness of

our own weakness, looking beyond ourselves, then power will come to us

above our desire and equal to our need. The old victories of faith will

be reproduced in us when we say with the ancient king, Lord! We know

not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee.' Then He will come to

us, to make us strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.' Wait

on the Lord and He will strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the

Lord.'

But courage is duty, too, as well as strength. Power and the

consciousness of power do not always go together. In regard to the

strength of nature, courage and might are quite separable. There may be

a strong coward and a weak hero. But in the spiritual region, strength

and courage do go together. The consciousness of the divine power with

us, and that alone, will make us bold with a boldness that has no taint

of levity and presumption mingled with it, and never will overestimate

its own strength. The charge to Joshua, then, not only insists upon the

duty of strength, but on the duty of conscious strength, and on the

duty of measuring the strength that is at my back with the weakness

that is against me, and of being bold because I know that more and

greater is He that is with me than are they that be with them.'

II. So much, then, for the first of the exhortations here. Now look

next at the duty of implicit obedience to the word of command.

That is another soldierly virtue, the exercise of which sheds a

nobility over the repulsive horrors of the battlefield. Joshua had to

be fitted to command by learning to obey, and, like that other soldier

whose rough trade had led him to some inkling of Christ's authority by

its familiarising him with the idea of the strange power of the word of

command, had to realise that he himself was under authority' before he

could issue his orders.

Courage and strength come first, and on them follows the command to do

all according to the law, to keep it without deflection to right or

left, and to meditate on it day and night. These two virtues make the

perfect soldier-courage and obedience. Daring and discipline must go

together, and to know how to follow orders is as essential as to know

how to despise dangers.

But the connection between these two, as set forth in this charge, is

not merely that they must co-exist, but that courage and strength are

needed for, and are to find their noblest field of exercise in,

absolute acceptance of, and unhesitating, swift, complete, unmurmuring

obedience to, everything that is discerned to be God's will and our

duty.

For the Christian soldier, then, God's law is his marching orders. The

written word, and especially the Incarnate Word, are our law of

conduct. The whole science of our warfare and plan of campaign are

there. We have not to take our orders from men's lips, but we must

often disregard them, that we may listen to the Captain of our

salvation.' The soldier stands where his officer has posted him, and

does what he was bid, no matter what may happen. Only one voice can

relieve him. Though a thousand should bid him flee, and his heart

should echo their advices, he is recreant if he deserts his post at the

command of any but him who set him there. Obedience to others is

mutiny. Nor does the Christian need another law to supplement that

which Christ has given him in His pattern and teaching. Men have

appended huge comments to it, and have softened some of its plain

precepts which bear hard on popular sins. But the Lawgiver's law is one

thing, and the lawyers' explanations which explain it away or darken

what was clear enough, however unwelcome, are quite another. Christ has

given us Himself, and therein has given a sufficient directory for

conduct and conflict which fits close to all our needs, and will prove

definite and practical enough if we honestly try to apply it.

The application of Christ's law to daily life takes some courage, and

is the proper field for the exercise of Christian strength. Be very

courageous that thou mayest observe.' If you are not a bold Christian

you will very soon get frightened out of obedience to your Master's

commandments. Courage, springing from the realisation of God's helping

strength, is indispensable to make any man, in any age, live out

thoroughly and consistently the principles of the law of Jesus Christ.

No man in this generation will work out a punctual obedience to what he

knows to be the will of God, without finding out that all the

Canaanites' are not dead yet; but that there are enough of them left to

make a very thorny life for the persistent follower of Jesus Christ.

And not only is there courage needed for the application of the

principles of conduct which God has given us, but you will never have

them handy for swift application unless, in many a quiet hour of

silent, solitary, patient meditation you have become familiar with

them. The recruit that has to learn on the battle-field how to use his

rifle has a good chance of being dead before he has mastered the

mysteries of firing. And Christian people that have their Christian

principles to dig out of the Bible when the necessity comes, will

likely find that the necessity is past before they have completed the

excavation. The actual battle-field is no place to learn drill. If a

soldier does not know how his sword hangs, and cannot get at it in a

moment, he will probably draw it too late.

I am afraid that the practice of such meditation as is meant here has

come to be, like the art of making ecclesiastical stained glass, almost

extinct in modern times. You have all so many newspapers and magazines

to read that the Bible has a chance of being shoved out of sight,

except on Sundays and in chapels. The meditating' that is enjoined in

my text is no mere intellectual study of Scripture, either from an

antiquarian or a literary or a theological point of view, but it is the

mastering of the principles of conduct as laid down there, and the

appropriating of all the power for guidance and for sustaining which

that word of the Lord gives. Meditation, the familiarising ourselves

with the ethics of Scripture, and with the hopes and powers that are

treasured in Jesus Christ, so that our minds are made up upon a great

many thorny questions as to what we ought to do, and that when crises

or dangers come, as they have a knack of coming, very suddenly, and are

sprung upon us unexpectedly, we shall be able, without much difficulty,

or much time spent in perplexed searching, to fall back upon the

principles that decide our conduct--that is essential to all successful

and victorious Christian life.

And it is the secret of all blessed Christian life. For there is a

lovely echo of these vigorous words of command to Joshua in a very much

more peaceful form in the 1st Psalm: Blessed is the man that walketh

not in the counsel of the ungodly, . . . but his delight is in the law

of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night'--the very

words that are employed in the text to describe the duty of the

soldier--therefore all that he doeth shall prosper.'

III. That leads to the last thought here--the sure victory of such bold

obedience.

Thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest'; Thou shalt make thy way

prosperous, and then shalt thou have good success,' or, as the last

word might be rendered, then shalt thou act wisely' You may not get

victory from an earthly point of view, for many a man that lives strong

and courageous and joyfully obeying God's law, as far as he knows it

and because he loves the Lawgiver, goes through life, and finds that,

as far as the world's estimate is concerned, there is nothing but

failure as his portion. Ah I but the world's way is not the true way of

estimating victory. Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world,' said

Jesus Christ when within arm's-length of the Cross. And His way is the

way in which we must conquer the world, if we conquer it at all. The

success which my text means is the carrying out of conscientious

convictions of God's will into practice. That is the only success that

is worth talking about or looking for. The man that succeeds in obeying

and translating God's will into conduct is the victor, whatever be the

outward fruits of his life. He may go out of the field beaten,

according to the estimate of men that can see no higher than their own

height, and little further than their own finger tips can reach; he may

himself feel that the world has gone past him, and that he has not made

much of it; he may have to lie down at last unknown, poor, with all his

bright hopes that danced before him in childhood gone, and sore beaten

by the enemies; but if he is able to say in the strength that Christ

gives, I have finished my course; I have kept the faith,' his way has

prospered,' and he has had' good success.' We are more than conquerors

through Him that loved us.'

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THE UNTRODDEN PATH AND THE GUIDING ARK

Come not near unto the ark, that ye may know the way by which ye must

go; for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'--JOSHUA iii. 4.

It was eminently true of Israel that they had not passed this way

heretofore,' inasmuch as the path which was opening before them,

through the oozy bed of the river, had never been seen by human eye,

nor trodden by man's foot. Their old leader was dead. There were only

two of the whole host that had ever been out of the desert in their

lives. They had a hard task before them. Jericho lay there, gleaming

across the plain, among the palm-trees, backed by the savage cliffs, up

the passes in which they would have to fight their way. So that we need

not wonder that, over and over again, in these early chapters of this

book, the advice in reiterated, Be of good courage. Be strong and fear

not!' They needed special guidance, and they received very special

guidance, and my text tells us what they had to do, in order to realise

the full blessing and guidance that was given them. Let there be a

space of 2000 cubits by measure between you and the

ark'--three-quarters of a mile or thereabouts--do not press close upon

the heels of the bearers, for you will not be able to see where they

are going if you crowd on them. Be patient. Let the course of the ark

disclose itself before you try to follow it, that ye may know the way

by which ye must go, for ye have not passed this way heretofore.'

I. Note the untrodden path.

I suppose that most of us have to travel a very well-worn road, and

that our course, in the cases of all except those in early life, is

liker that of a millhorse than an untrodden path. Most of us are

continually treading again in the prints of our own footsteps. A long,

weary stretch of monotonous duties, and the repetition of the same

things to-day that we did yesterday is the destiny of most of us.

Some of us, perhaps, may be standing upon the verge of some new scenes

in our lives. Some of you young people may have come up to a great city

for the first time to carve out a position for yourselves, and are for

the first time encompassed by the temptations of being unknown in a

crowd. Some of you may be in new domestic circumstances, some with new

sorrows, or tasks, or difficulties pressing upon you, calling for

wisdom and patience. It is quite likely that there may be some who, in

the most prosaic and literal sense of the words, are entering on a path

altogether new and untrodden. But they will be in the minority, and for

the most of us the days that were full of new possibilities are at an

end, and we have to expect little more than the monotonous repetition

of the habitual, humdrum duties of mature life. We have climbed the

winding paths up the hill, and most of us are upon the long plateau

that stretches unvaried, until it begins to dip at the further edge.

And some of us are going down that other side of the hill.

But whatever may be the variety in regard to the mere externals of our

lives, how true it is about us all that even the most familiar duties

of to-day are not quite like the same duties when they had to be done

yesterday; and that the path for each of us--though, as we go along, we

find in it nothing new--is yet an untrodden path! For we are not quite

the same as we were yesterday, though our work may be the same, and the

difference in us makes it in some measure different.

But what mainly makes even the most well-beaten paths new at the

thousandth time of traversing them is our ignorance of what may be

waiting round the next turn of the road. The veil that hangs before and

hides the future is a blessing, though we sometimes grumble at it, and

sometimes petulantly try to make pinholes through it, and peep in to

see a little of what is behind it. It brings freshness into our lives,

and a possibility of anticipation, and even of wonder and expectation,

that prevents us from stagnating. Even in the most habitual repetition

of the same tasks ye have not passed this way heretofore.' And life for

every one of us is still full of possibilities so great and so terrible

that we may well feel that the mist that covers the future is a

blessing and a source of strength for us all.

Our march through time is like that of men in a mist, in which things

loom in strangely distorted shapes, unlike their real selves, until we

get close up to them, and only then do we discover them.

So for us all the path is new and unknown by reason of the sudden

surprises that may be sprung upon us, by reason of the sudden

temptations that may start up at any moment in our course, by reason of

the earthquakes that may shatter the most solid-seeming lives, by

reason of the sudden calamities that may fall upon us. The sorrows that

we anticipate seldom come, and those that do come are seldom

anticipated. The most fatal bolts are generally from the blue. One

flash, all unlooked for, is enough to blast the tree in all its leafy

pride. Many of us, I have no doubt, can look back to times in our lives

when, without anticipation on our parts, or warning from anything

outside of us, a smiting hand fell upon some of our blessings. The

morning dawned upon the gourd in full vigour of growth, and in the

evening it was stretched yellow and wilted upon the turf. Dear

brethren, anything may come out of that dark cloud through which our

life's course has to pass, and there are some things concerning which

all that we know is that they must come.

These are very old threadbare thoughts; I dare say you think it was not

worth your while to come to hear them, nor mine to speak them; but if

we would lay them to heart, and realise how true it is about every step

of our earthly course that ye have not passed this way heretofore,' we

should complain less than we do of the weariness and prosaic character

of our commonplace lives, and feel that all was mystical and great and

awful; and yet most blessed in its possibilities and its uncertainties.

II. Note, again, the guiding ark.

It was a new thing that the ark should become the guide of the people.

All through the wilderness, according to the history, it had been

carried in the centre of the march, and had had no share in the

direction of the course. That had been done by the pillar of cloud.

But, just as the manna ceased when the tribes got across the Jordan and

could eat the bread of the land, the miracle ending and they being left

to trust to ordinary means of supply at the earliest possible moment,

so there ensued an approximation to ordinary guidance, which is none

the less real because it is granted without miracle. The pillar of

cloud ceased to move before the people in the crossing of the Jordan,

and its place was taken by the material symbol of the presence of God,

which contained the tables of the law as the basis of the covenant. And

that ark moved at the commandment of the leader Joshua, for he was the

mouthpiece of the divine will in the matter. And so when the ark moved

at the bidding of the leader, and became the guide of the people, there

was a kind of a drop down from the pure supernatural of the guiding

pillar.

For us a similar thing is true. Jesus Christ is the true Ark of God.

For what was the ark? the symbol of the divine Presence; and Christ is

the reality of the divine Presence with men. The whole content of that

ark was the law of the Lord,' and Jesus Christ is the embodied law of

the present God. The ark was the sign that God had entered into this

covenant with these people, and that they had a right to say to Him,

Thou art our God, and we are Thy people,' and the same double assurance

of reciprocal possession and mutual delight in possession is granted to

us in and through Jesus Christ our Lord.

So He becomes the guiding Ark, the Shepherd of Israel. His presence and

will are our directors. The law, which is contained and incorporated in

Him, is that by which we are to walk. The covenant which He has

established in His own blood between God and man contains in itself not

only the direction for conduct, but also the motives which will impel

us to walk where and as He enjoins.

And so, every way we may say, by His providences which He appoints, by

His example which He sets us, by His gracious word in which He sums up

all human duties in the one sweet obligation, Follow Me,' and even more

by His Spirit that dwells in us, and whispers in our ears, This is the

way; walk ye in it,' and enlightens every perplexity, and strengthens

all feebleness, and directs our footsteps into the way of peace; that

living and personal Ark of the covenant of the Lord of the whole earth

is still the guide of waiting and docile hearts. Jesus Christ's one

word to us is, If any man serve Me, let him follow Me. And where I

am'--of course, seeing he is a follower--there shall also My servant

be.'

The one Pattern for us, the one Example that we need to follow, the one

Strength in our perplexities, the true Director of our feet, is that

dear Lord, if we will only listen to Him. And that direction will be

given to us in regard to the trifles, as in regard to the great things

of our lives.

III. And so the last thought that is here is the watchful following.

Come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye ought to

go.' In a shipwreck, the chances are that the boats will be swamped by

the people scrambling into them in too great a hurry. In the Christian

life most of the mistakes that people make arise from their not letting

the ark go far enough ahead of them before they gather up their

belongings and follow it. An impatience of the half-declared divine

will, a running before we are sent, an acting before we are quite sure

that God wills us to do so-and-so, are at the root of most of the

failures of Christian effort, and of a large number of the miseries of

Christian men. If we would only have patience! Three-quarters of a mile

the ark went ahead before a man lifted a foot to follow it, and there

was no mistake possible then.

Now do not be in a hurry to act. Raw haste' is half-sister to delay.'

We are all impatient of uncertainty, either in opinion or in conduct;

but if you are not quite sure what God wants you to do, you may be

quite sure that He does not at present want you to do anything. Wait

till you see what He does wish you to do. Better, better far, to spend

hours in silent--although people that know nothing about what we are

doing may call it indolent--waiting for the clear declaration of God's

will, than to hurry on paths which, after we have gone on them far

enough to make it a mortification and a weariness to turn back, we

shall find out to have been not His at all, but only our own mistakes

as to where the ark would have us go.

And that there may be this patience the one thing needful-as, indeed,

it is the one thing needful for all strength of all kinds in the

Christian life--is the rigid suppression of our own wills. That is the

secret of goodness, and its opposite is the secret of evil. To live by

my own will is to die. Nothing but blunders, nothing but miseries,

nothing but failures, nothing but remorse, will be the fruit of such a

life. And a great many of us who call ourselves Christians are not

Christians in the sense of having Christ's will for our absolute law,

and keeping our own will entirely in subordination thereto. As is the

will, so is the man, and whoever does not bow himself absolutely, and

hush all the babble of his own inclinations and tastes and decisions,

in order that that great Voice may speak, has small chance of ever

walking in the paths of righteousness, or finding that his ways please

the Lord.

Suppress your own wills, dwell near God, that you may hear His lightest

whisper. I will guide thee with Mine eye.' What is the use of the

glance of an eye if the man for whom it is meant is half a mile off,

and staring about him at everything except the eye that would guide?

And that is what some of us that call ourselves Christian people are.

God might look guidance at us for a week, and we should never know that

He was doing it; we have so many other things to look after. And we are

so far away from Him that it would need a telescope for us to see His

face. I will guide thee with Mine eye.' Keep near Him, and you will not

lack direction.

And so, dear brethren, if we stay ourselves on, and wait patiently for,

Him, and are content to do what He wishes, and never to run without a

clear commission, nor to act without a full conviction of duty, then

the old story of my text will repeat itself in our daily life, as well

as in the noblest form in the last act of life, which is death. The

Lord will move before us and open a safe, dry path for us between the

heaped waters; and where the feet of our great High Priest, bearing the

Ark of the Covenant of the Lord, stood, amidst the slime and the mud,

we may plant our firm feet on the stones that He has left there. And so

the stream of life, like the river of death, will be parted for

Christ's followers, and they will pass over on dry ground, until all

the people are passed clean over Jordan.'

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THE WATERS SAW THEE; THEY WERE AFRAID'

And Joshua said unto the people, Sanctify yourselves: for tomorrow the

Lord will do wonders among you. 6. And Joshua spake unto the priests,

saying, Take up the ark of the covenant, and pass over before the

people. And they took up the ark of the covenant, and went before the

people. 7. And the Lord said unto Joshua, This day will I begin to

magnify thee in the sight of all Israel, that they may know that, as I

was with Moses, so I will be with thee. 8 And thou shalt command the

priests that bear the ark of the covenant, saying, When ye are come to

the brink of the water of Jordan, ye shall stand still in Jordan. 8.

And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, Come hither, and hear the

words of the Lord your God. 10. And Joshua said, Hereby ye shall know

that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive

out from before you the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Hivites,

and the Perizzites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the

Jebusites. 11. Behold, the ark of the covenant of the Lord of all the

earth passeth Over before you into Jordan. 12. Now therefore take you

twelve men out of the tribes of Israel, out of every tribe a man. 13.

And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the

priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall

rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be out

off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand

upon an heap. 14. And it came to pass, when the people removed from

their tents, to pass over Jordan, and the priests bearing the ark of

the covenant before the people; 15. And as they that bare the ark were

come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were

dipped in the brim of the water, (for Jordan overfloweth all his banks

all the time of harvest,) 16. That the waters which came down from

above stood and rose up upon an heap very far from the city Adam, that

is beside Zaretan: and those that came down toward the sea of the

plain, even the salt sea failed, and were cut off: and the people

passed over right against Jericho. 17. And the priests that bare the

ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst

of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground, until all

the people were passed clean over Jordan.'--JOSHUA iii. 5-17.

The arrangement of the narrative of the passage of Jordan, which

occupies chapters iii. and iv., is remarkable, and has led to

suggestions of interpolation and blending of two accounts, which are

quite unnecessary. It is divided into four sections,--the preparations

(Joshua iii. 1-6), the passage (Joshua iii. 7-17), the lifting of the

memorial stones from the river's bed and the fixing of one set of them

in it (Joshua iv. 1-14), the return of the waters, and the erection of

the second set of memorial stones at Gilgal (Joshua iv. 15-24).

Each section closes with a summary of the whole transaction, after the

common manner of Old Testament history, which gives to a hasty reader

the impression of confusion and repetition; but a little attention

shows a very symmetrical arrangement, negativing the possibility of

interpolation. The last three sections are all built on the same lines.

In each there is a triple division,--God's command to Joshua, Joshua's

communication of it to the people, and the actual fact, fulfilling

these. So each stage passes thrice before the view, and the

impressiveness of the history is heightened by our seeing it first in

the mirror of the divine Word, and then in the orders of the commander,

before we see it as a thing actually happening.

Verses 5 and 6 of the chapter belong to the section which deals with

the preparation. General instructions had been already issued that the

host was to follow the ark, leaving two thousand cubits between them

and it; but nothing had been said as to how Jordan was to be crossed.

No doubt many a question and doubt had been muttered by the

watch-fires, as the people looked at the muddy, turbid stream, swirling

in flood. The spies probably managed to swim it, but that was a feat

worthy to be named in the epitaph of heroes (1 Chron. xii. 15), and

impossible for the crowd of all ages and both sexes which followed

Joshua. There was the rushing stream, swollen as it always is in

harvest. How were they to get over? And if the people of Jericho, right

over against them, chose to fall upon them as they were struggling

across, what could hinder utter defeat? No doubt, all that was

canvassed, in all sorts of tones; but no inkling of the miracle seems

to have been given.

God often opens His hand by one finger at a time, and leaves us face to

face with some plain but difficult duty, without letting us see the

helps to its performance, till we need to use them. If we go right on

the road which He has traced out, it will never lead us into a blind

alley. The mountains will part before us as we come near what looked

their impassable wall; and some narrow gorge or other, wide enough to

run a track through, but not wide enough to be noticed before we are

close on it, will be sure to open. The attitude of expectation of God's

help, while its nature is unrevealed, is kept up in Joshua's last

instruction. The people are bidden to sanctify themselves, because

to-morrow the Lord will do wonders' among them. That sanctifying was

not external, but included the hallowing of spirit by docile waiting

for His intervention, and by obedience while the manner of it was

hidden. The secret of to-morrow is partly made known, and the faith of

the people is nourished by the mystery remaining, as well as by the

light given. The best security for to-morrow's wonders is to-day's

sanctifying.

The command to the priests discloses to them a little more, in bidding

them pass over before the people, but the additional disclosure would

only be an additional trial of faith; for the silence as to how so

impossible a command was to be made possible is absolute. The swollen

river had obliterated all fords; and how were priests, staggering under

the weight of the ark on their shoulders, to pass over'? The question

is not answered till the ark is on their shoulders. To-day often sees

to-morrow's duty without seeing how it is to be done. But the bearers

of the ark need never fear but that the God to whom it belongs will

take care of it and of them. The last sentence of verse 6 is the

anticipatory summary which closes each section.

In verses 7-17 we have the narrative of the actual crossing, in its

three divisions of God's command (vs. 7-8), Joshua's repetition of it

(vs. 9-13), and the historical fact (vs. 14-17). The final instructions

were only given on the morning of the day of crossing. The report of

God's commands given in verses 7 and 8 is condensed, as is evident from

the fuller statement of them in Joshua's address to the people, which

immediately follows. In it Joshua is fully aware of the manner of the

miracle and of the details of the crossing, but we have no record of

his having received them. The summary of that eventful morning's

instructions to him emphasises first the bearing of the miracle on his

reputation. The passage of the Red Sea had authenticated the mission of

Moses to the past generation, who, in consequence of it, believed God

and His servant Moses.' The new generation are to have a parallel

authentication of Joshua's commission. It is noteworthy that this is

not the purpose of the miracle which the leader announces to the people

in verse 10. It was a message from God to himself, a kind of gracious

whisper meant for his own encouragement. What a thought to fill a man's

heart with humble devotion, that God would work such a wonder in order

to demonstrate that He was with him! And what a glimpse of more to

follow lay in that promise, This day will I begin to magnify thee I.'

The command to the priests in verse 8 is also obviously condensed; for

Joshua's version of it, which follows, is much more detailed, and

contains particular instructions, which must have been derived from the

divine word to him on that morning.

We may pass on, then, to the second division of the narrative; namely,

Joshua's communication of God's commands to the people. Observe the

form which the purpose of the miracle assumes there. It is the

confirmation of the divine Presence, not with the leader, but with the

people and their consequent victory. Joshua grasped the inmost meaning

of God's Word to himself, and showed noble self-suppression, when he

thus turned the direction of the miracle. The true servant of God knows

that God is with him, not for his personal glorification, but for the

welfare of God's people, and cares little for the estimation in which

men hold him, if they will only believe that the conquering God is with

them. We too often make great leaders and teachers in the church opaque

barriers to hide God from us, instead of transparent windows through

which He shines upon His people. We are a great deal more ready to say,

God is with him,' than to add, and therefore God is with us, in our

Joshuas, and without them.'

Observe the grand emphasis of that name, the living God,' tacitly

contrasted with the dead idols of the enemies, and sealing the

assurance of His swift and all-conquering might. Observe, too, the

triumphant contempt in the enumeration of the many tribes of the foe

with their barbarous names. Five of them had been enough, when named by

the spies' trembling lips, to terrify the congregation, but here the

list of the whole seven but strengthens confidence. Faith delights to

look steadily at its enemies, knowing that the one Helper is more than

they all. This catalogue breathes the same spirit as Paul's rapturous

list of the foes impotent to separate from the love of God. Mark, too,

the long-drawn-out designation of the ark, with its accumulation of

nouns, which grammatical purists have found difficult,--the ark of the

covenant of the Lord of all the earth'; where it leads they need not

fear to follow. It was the pledge of His presence, it contained the Ten

Words on which His covenant was concluded. That covenant enlisted on

their side Him who was Lord of the swollen river as of all the fierce

clans beyond; and with His ark in front, their victory was sure. If

ever the contemplation of His power and covenant relation was in place,

it was on that morning, as Israel stood ranked for the march that was

to lead them through Jordan, and to plant their feet on the soil of

Canaan. Nor must we omit the peculiar appropriateness of this solemn

designation, on the occasion of the ark's first becoming the leader of

the march. Hitherto it had been carried in the centre; now it was moved

to the van, and took the place of the pillar, which blazed no more. But

the guidance was no less divine. The simple coffer which Bezaleel had

made was as august and reliable a symbol of God's presence as the

pillar; and the tables of the law, shut in it, were henceforth to be

the best directors of the nation.

Then follows the command to elect twelve representatives of the tribes,

for a purpose not yet explained; and then, at the last moment, the

manner of crossing is disclosed, to the silencing of wise doubters and

the confirmation of ignorant faith. The brief anticipatory announcement

of the miracle puts stress on the arrest of the waters at the instant

when the priests' feet touched them, and tells what is to befall the

arrested torrent above the point where the ark stood, saying nothing

about the lower stretch of the river, and just hinting by one word

heap' the parallel between this miracle and that of the passing of the

Red Sea: The floods stood upright as an heap' (Exod. xv. 8).

Verses 14-17 narrate the actual crossing. One long sentence, like the

roll of an Atlantic wave, or a long-drawn shout of triumph, masses

together the stages of the march; the breaking up of the encampment;

the solemn advance of the ark, watched by the motionless crowd; its

approach to the foaming stream, running bank-full, as is its wont in

the early harvest months; the decisive moment when the naked feet of

the priests were dipped in the water. What a hush of almost painful

expectation would fall on the gazers! Then, with a rush of triumph, the

long sentence pours on, like a river escaping from some rocky gorge,

and tells the details of the transcendent fact. Looking up stream, the

water stood'; and, as the flow above went on, it was dammed up, and, as

would appear, swept back to a point not now known, but apparently some

miles up. Looking down the course, the water flowed naturally to the

Dead Sea; and, in effect, the whole bed southwards was quickly left

bare, giving room for the advance of the people with wide-extended

front, while the priests, with the ark on their shoulders, stood silent

in the midst of the bed, between the heaped waters and the hasting

host. Verse 17 gives the usual summary sentence, which partly

anticipates what is still to follow, but here comes in with special

force, as gathering up the whole wonderful scene, and recounting once

more, and not without a ring of astonished triumph, how the priests

stood firm on dry ground in that strange place, until all the nation

were passed clean over Jordan.'

From verses 7 and 10 we learn the purpose of this miracle as being

twofold. It was intended to stamp the seal of God's approbation on

Joshua, and to hearten the people by the assurance of God's fighting

for them. The leader was thereby put on the level of Moses, the people,

on that of the generation before whom the Red Sea had been divided. The

parallel with that event is obvious and significant. The miracle which

led Israel into the wilderness is repeated as they pass from it. The

first stage of their deliverance and the second are begun with

analogous displays of divine power. The same arm which cleft the sea is

stretched out, after all sins, for the new generation, and is not

shortened that it cannot save.' God does not disdain to duplicate His

wonders, even for very unworthy servants. The unchanging,

long-suffering patience, and the unwearied strength to which all

generations in succession can turn with confidence, are wonderfully set

forth by these two miracles. And though we have passed into the higher

stage, where miracles have ceased, the principle which dictated the

parallelism still holds good, and we too can look back to all these

ancient wonders, and be sure that they are done over and over again

according to our needs. As we have heard, so have we seen,' might have

been Israel's song that day, as it may be ours every day.

The beautiful application made of the parted waters of Jordan in

Christian literature, which sees in them the prophecy of conquered

death, is perhaps scarcely in accordance with truth, for the divided

Jordan was the introduction, not to peace, but to warfare. But it is

too deeply impressed on the heart to be lightly put aside, and we may

well allow faith and hope to discern in the stream, whose swollen

waters shrink backwards as soon as the ark is borne into their turbid

and swift current, an emblem of that dark flood that rolled between the

host of God and their home, and was dried up as soon as the pierced

foot of the Christ touched its cold waters.

What ailest thee, thou sea, that thou fleest; thou Jordan, that thou

turnest back?' Christ has gone up before us. He has shaken His hand

over the river, and caused men to go over dry shod.

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STONES CRYING OUT

For the priests which bare the ark stood in the midst of Jordan, until

every thing was finished that the Lord commanded Joshua to speak unto

the people, according to all that Moses commanded Joshua: and the

people hasted and passed over. 11. And it came to pass, when all the

people were clean passed over, that the ark of the Lord passed over,

and the priests, in the presence of the people. 12. And the children of

Reuben, and the children of Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, passed

over armed before the children of Israel, as Moses spake unto them: 13.

About forty thousand prepared for war passed over before the Lord unto

battle, to the plains of Jericho. 14. On that day the Lord magnified

Joshua in the sight of all Israel; and they feared him, as they feared

Moses, all the days of his life. 15. And the Lord spake unto Joshua,

saying, 16. Command the priests that bare the ark of the testimony,

that they come up out of Jordan. 17. Joshua therefore commanded the

priests, saying, Come ye up out of Jordan. 18. And it came to pass,

when the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord were

come up out of the midst of Jordan, and the soles of the priests' feet

were lifted up unto the dry land, that the waters of Jordan returned

unto their place, and flowed over all his banks, as they did before.

19. And the people came up out of Jordan on the tenth day of the first

month, and encamped in Gilgal, in the east border of Jericho. 80. And

those twelve stones, which they took out of Jordan, did Joshua pitch in

Gilgal. 21. And he spake unto the children of Israel, saying, When your

children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean

these stones? 22. Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel

came over this Jordan on dry land. 23. For the Lord your God dried up

the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the

Lord your God did to the Red sea, which He dried up from before us,

until we were gone over: 24. That all the people of the earth might

know the hand of the Lord, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the

Lord your God for ever.'--JOSHUA iv. 10-24.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first (from verses 1 to

14) has as its main subject the bringing up of the twelve memorial

stones from the bed of Jordan; the second (verse 15 to the end) gives

the conclusion of the whole incident. The plan of arrangement, already

pointed out in a former chapter, is very plain in this. Each section

has God's commands to Joshua, Joshua's to the people, and the execution

of these. To each is appended a summary, which anticipates the more

detailed particulars that follow. Our text begins in the middle of the

first section, but we must glance at the preceding verses. These tell

how, when the people were all across, Joshua, who had apparently

remained on the eastern bank with the twelve representatives of the

tribes, received God's command to tell these the purpose for which they

had been chosen, and to set them to execute it. This additional

instruction is the explanation of the apparent discrepancy between

Joshua iii. 12 and iv. 2. Verses 4-8 tell Joshua's communication of the

instructions to the men; verse 8 narrates the execution of them by each

man's wrenching up from the river's bed a great stone, with which he

toiled through the muddy ooze to the western shore, and thence over the

hot plain to Gilgal, where the host camped; verse 9 tells that twelve

other stones were set up where the priests had stood, and were visible

at some time after date, when it was written; but when that was, or

whether the verse is part of the original or a later note, we cannot

say. At any rate, there were two memorials, one on the bank, one in the

stream--a grand jury of great stones,' as Thomas Fuller calls them.

There is no difficulty in supposing that the monument in the river was

firm enough to resist its current, and high enough to be visible either

above the surface or beneath the ordinarily shallow water.

I. The first picture here brought before us is that of the motionless

ark in the midst of what had been Jordan. There is an obvious intention

to contrast the stillness of the priests, bearing it on their

shoulders, and standing rooted in that strange place all these long

hours, with the hurry around. The priests stood . . . and the people

hasted.' However broad the front and swift the march, the crossing must

have taken many hours. The haste was not from fear, but eagerness. It

was an industrious speed and mannerly quickness, as not willing to make

God wait upon them, in continuing a miracle longer than necessity did

require.' When all were over, then came the twelve and Joshua, who

would spend some time in gathering the stones and rearing the memorial

in the river-bed. Through all the stir the ark was still. Over all the

march it watched. So long as one Israelite was in the channel it

remained, a silent presence, to ensure his safety. It let their rate of

speed determine the length of its standing there. It waited for the

slowest foot and the weariest laggard. God makes His very present help'

of the same length as our necessities, and lets us beat the time to

which He conforms. Not till the last loiterer has struggled to the

farther shore does He cease by His presence to keep His people safe on

the strange road which by His presence He has opened for them.

The silent presence of the ark is enough to dam up the stream. There is

vehement action around, but the cause of it all is in absolute repose.

God moves all things, Himself unmoved. He worketh hitherto,' and no

intensity of energy breaks the depth of His perfect rest. His activity

implies no effort, and is followed by no exhaustion. The ark is still,

while it holds back a swollen river for hours. The centre of the

swiftest revolution is a point of rest.

The form of the miracle was a condescension to weak faith, to which

help was ministered by giving sense something to grasp. It was easier

to believe that the torrent would not rush down on them when they could

look at the priests standing there motionless, with the visible symbol

of God's presence on their shoulders. The ark was no more the cause of

the miracle than were its carriers; but, just as Jesus helped one blind

man by laying moistened earth on his eyes, and another by sending him

to Siloam to wash, so God did here. Children learn best when they have

something to look at. Sight is sometimes the servant of faith.

We need not dwell on the summary, beginning with verse 11, which

anticipates the subject of the next section, and adds that the fighting

men of the tribes who had already received their inheritance on the

east bank of Jordan, loyally kept their promise, and marched with their

brethren to the campaign.

II. Verses 15-18 finish the story with the return of the waters to

their bed. The triple division appears again. First God commands

Joshua, who then transmits the command to the people, who, in turn,

then obey. And thus at each stage the divine causality, Joshua's

delegated but absolute authority, and the people's prompt obedience,

are signalised; and the whole incident, in all its parts, is set forth

as on the one hand a conspicuous instance of God's interposition, and,

on the other, of Israel's willing service.

We can fancy how the people who had reached the western shore lined the

bank, gazing on the group in the channel, who still stood waiting God's

command to relieve them at their post. The word comes at last, and is

immediately obeyed. May we not learn the lesson to stand fixed and

patient wherever God sets us, as long as He does not call us thence?

God's priests should be like the legionary on guard in Pompeii, who

stuck to his post while the ashes were falling thick, and was smothered

by them, rather than leave his charge without his commander's orders.

One graphic word pictures the priests lifting, or, as it might be

translated, plucking,' the soles of their feet from the slimy bottom

into which they had settled down by reason of long standing still. They

reach the bank, marching as steadily with their sacred burden as might

be over so rough and slippery a road. The first to enter were the last

to leave the river's bed. God's ark goes before us,' and is our

rearward.' He besets us behind and before, and all dangerous service is

safe if begun and ended in Him. The one point made prominent is the

instantaneous rush back of the impatient torrent as soon as the curb

was taken off. Like some horse rejoicing to be free, the tawny flood

pours down, and soon everything looks as aforetime,' except for the new

rock, piled by human hands, round which the waters chafed. The dullest

would understand what had wrought the miracle when they saw the

immediate consequence of the ark's leaving its place. Cause and effect

seldom come thus close together in God's dealings; but sometimes He

lets us see them as near each other as the lightning and the thunder,

that we may learn to trace them in faith, when centuries part them. How

the people would gaze as the hurrying stream covered up their path, and

would look across to the further shore, almost doubting if they had

really stood there that morning! They were indeed Hebrews'--men from

the other side-now, and would set themselves to the dangerous task

before them with courage. Well begun is half done'; and God would not

divide the river for them to thrust them into a tiger's den, where they

would be torn to pieces. Retreat was impossible now. A new page in

their history was turned. The desert was as unreachable as Egypt, The

passage of the Jordan rounded off the epoch which the passage of the

Bed Sea introduced, and began a new era.

That parallelism of the two crossings is suggested by the notice of

date in verse 19. The tenth day of the first month' was just forty

years to a day since the first Paschal lamb had been chosen, and four

days short of the Passover, which was solemnised at Gilgal (Joshua v.

10) where they encamped that night. It was a short march from the point

of crossing, and a still shorter from Jericho. It would have been easy

to fall upon the invaders as they straggled across the river, but no

attempt was made to dispute the passage, though, no doubt, many a keen

pair of eyes watched it from the neighbouring hills. In the beginning

of the next chapter we are told why there was this singular supineness.

Their heart melted, neither was there spirit in them any more,' or, in

more modern language, panic laid hold of the enemy, and they could not

pluck up courage to oppose the advance of Israel. If we add this result

to those mentioned in chapter in., we find sufficient motive for the

miracle to take it out of the class of purposeless, legendary wonders.

Given the importance of Israel as the depositaries of revelation, there

is nothing unreasonable in a miracle which so powerfully contributed to

their conquest of Canaan, and we have yet to learn that there is

anything unreasonable in the belief that they were the depositaries of

revelation. The fundamental postulate of the Old Testament is a

supernatural revelation, and that opens the door for any miracle

needful for its accomplishment. It is folly to seek to conciliate by

minimising the miraculous element. However much may be thrown out to

the wolves, they will not cease to pursue and show their teeth. We

should be very slow to pronounce on what is worthy of God; but any man

who believes in a divine revelation, given to the world through Israel,

may well believe in such a miracle as this at such a moment of their

history.

III. The memorial stones (verses 20-24). Gilgal, the first encampment,

lay defenceless in the open plain, and the first thing to be done would

be to throw up some earthwork round the camp. It seems to have been the

resting-place of the ark and probably of the non-combatants, during the

conquest, and to have derived thence a sacredness which long clung to

it, and finally led, singularly enough, to its becoming a centre of

idolatrous worship. The rude circle of unhewn stones without

inscription was, no doubt, exactly like the many prehistoric monuments

found all over the world, which forgotten races have raised to keep in

everlasting remembrance forgotten fights and heroes. It was a

comparatively small thing; for each stone was but a load for one man,

and it would seem mean enough by the side of Stonehenge or Carnac, just

as Israel's history is on a small scale, as compared with the

world-embracing empires of old. Size is not greatness; and Joshua's

little circle told a more wonderful story than its taller kindred, or

Egyptian obelisks or colossi.

These grey stones preached at once the duty of remembering, and the

danger of forgetting, the past mercies of God. When they were reared,

they would seem needless; but the deepest impressions get filled up by

degrees, as the river of time deposits its sands on them. We do not

forget pain so quickly as joy, and most men have a longer and keener

remembrance of their injurers than of their benefactors, human or

divine. The stones were set up because Israel remembered, but also lest

Israel should forget. We often think of the Jews as monsters of

ingratitude; but we should more truly learn the lesson of their

history, if we regarded them as fair, average men, and asked ourselves

whether our recollection of God's goodness to us is much more vivid

than theirs. Unless we make distinct and frequent efforts to recall, we

shall certainly forget all His benefits.' The cultivation of thankful

remembrance is a very large part of practical religion; and it is not

by accident that the Psalmist puts it in the middle, between hope and

obedience, when he says that they might set their hope in God, and not

forget the works of God, but keep His commandments' (Psalm lxxviii. 7).

The memorial stones further proclaimed the duty of parental instruction

in God's mercies. They speak of a time when tradition was the vehicle

of history; when books were rare, and monuments were relied upon to

awaken curiosity which a father's words would satisfy. Notwithstanding

all differences in means of obtaining knowledge, the old law remains in

full force, that the parent is the natural and most powerful instructor

in the ways of God. The Jewish father was not to send his child to some

Levite or other to get his question answered, but was to answer it

himself. I am afraid that a good many English parents, who call

themselves Christians, are too apt to say, Ask your Sunday-school

teacher,' when such questions are put to them. The decay of parental

religious teaching is working enormous mischief in Christian

households; and the happiest results would follow if Joshua's homely

advice were attended to, Ye shall let your children know.'

The same principle which led to the erection of this simple monument

reaches its highest and sacredest instance in the institution of the

Lord's Supper, in which Jesus, with wonderful lowliness, condescends to

avail Himself of material symbols in order to secure a firmer place in

treacherous memories. He might well have expected that such stupendous

love could never be forgotten; but He knoweth our frame,' and trusts

some share in keeping His death vividly in the hearts of His people to

the humble ministry of bread and wine, Strange that we should need to

be reminded of the death which it is life to remember! Blessed that,

needing it, we have the need so tenderly met, and that He does not

disdain to accept loving memories which slumber till stirred by such

poor reminders of His unspeakable love!

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THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD'S HOST

And he said, Nay, but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now

come.'--JOSHUA v. 14.

The army of Israel was just beginning a hard conflict under an untried

leader. Behind them the Jordan barred their retreat, in front of them

Jericho forbade their advance. Most of them had never seen a fortified

city, and had no experience nor engines for a siege. So we may well

suppose that many doubts and fears shook the courage of the host, as it

drew around the doomed city. Their chief had his own heavy burden. He

seems to have gone apart to meditate on what his next step was to be.

Absorbed in thought, he lifts up his eyes mechanically, as brooding men

will, not expecting to see anything, and is startled by the silent

figure of a man with a sword drawn' in his hand, close beside him.

There is nothing supernatural in his appearance; and the immediate

thought of the leader is, Is this one of the enemy that has stolen upon

my solitude?' So, promptly and boldly, he strides up to him with the

quick challenge: Whose side are you on? Are you one of us, or from the

enemy's camp?' And then the silent lips open. Upon neither the one nor

the other. I am not on your side, you are on mine, for as Captain of

the Lord's host, am I come up.' And then Joshua falls on his face,

recognises his Commander-in-Chief, owns himself a subordinate, and asks

for orders. What saith my Lord unto his servant?'

Now let us try to gather the meaning and the lessons of this striking

incident.

I. I see in it a transient revelation of an eternal truth.

I believe, as the vast majority of careful students of the course of

Old Testament revelation and its relation to the New Testament

completion believe, that we have here not a record of the appearance of

a created superhuman person, but that of a preliminary manifestation of

the Eternal Word of God, who, in the fulness of time, became flesh and

dwelt among us.'

You will observe that there run throughout the whole of the Old

Testament notices of the occasional manifestation of a mysterious

person who is named the Angel,' the Angel of the Lord.' For instance,

in the great scene in the wilderness, where the bush burned and was not

consumed, he who appeared is named the Angel of the Lord'; and his lips

declare I am that I am.' In like manner, soon after, the divine voice

speaks to Moses of the Angel in whom is My name.'

When Balaam had his path blocked amongst the vineyards, it was a

replica of the figure of my text that stayed his way, a man with a

drawn sword in his hand, who spoke in autocratic and divine fashion.

When the parents of Samson were apprised of the coming birth of the

hero, it was the Angel of the Lord' that appeared to them, accepted

their sacrifice, declared the divine will, and disappeared in a flame

of fire from the altar. A psalm speaks of the Angel of the Lord' as

encamping round about them that fear him, and delivering them. Isaiah

tells us of the Angel of his face,' who was afflicted in all Israel's

afflictions, and saved them.' And the last prophetic utterance of the

Old Testament is most distinct and remarkable in its strange

identification and separation of Jehovah and the Angel, when it says,

the Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple, even the Angel of the

Covenant.' Now, if we put all these passages--and they are but select

instances--if we put all these passages together, I think we cannot

help seeing that there runs, as I said, throughout the whole of the Old

Testament a singular strain of revelation in regard to a Person who, in

a remarkable manner, is distinguished from the created hosts of angel

beings, and also is distinguished from, and yet in name, attributes,

and worship all but identified with, the Lord Himself.

If we turn to the narrative before us, we find there similar phenomena

marked out. For this mysterious man with the sword drawn' in his hand,

quotes the very words which were spoken at the bush, when he says,

Loose thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest

is holy.' And by fair implication, He would have us to identify the

persons in these two great theophanies. He ascribes to Himself, in the

further conversation in the next chapter, directly divine attributes,

and is named by the sacred name; The Lord said unto Joshua, see, I have

given into thy hand Jericho and its king.'

If we turn to the New Testament, we find that there under another image

the same strain of thought is presented. The Word of God, who from

everlasting was with God, and was God,' is represented as being the

Agent of Creation, the Source of all human illumination, the Director

of Providence, the Lord of the Universe. By him were all things, and in

him all things consists.' So, surely, these two halves make a whole;

and the Angel of the Lord, separate and yet so strangely identified

with Jehovah, who at the crises of the nation's history, and stages of

the development of the process of Revelation, is manifested, and the

Eternal Word of God, whom the New Testament reveals to us, are one and

the same.

This truth was transiently manifested in our text. The vision passed,

the ground that was hallowed by His foot is undistinguished now in the

sweltering plain round the mound that once was Jericho. But the fact

remains, the humanity, that was only in appearance, and for a few

minutes, assumed then, has now been taken up into everlasting union

with the divine nature, and a Man reigns on the Throne, and is

Commander of all who battle for the truth and the right. The eternal

order of the universe is before us here.

It only remains to say a word in reference to the sweep of the command

which our vision assigns to the Angel of the Lord. Captain of the

Lord's host' means a great deal more than the true General of Israel's

little army. It does mean that, or the words and the vision would cease

to have relevance and bearing on the moment's circumstances and need.

But it includes also, as the usage of Scripture would sufficiently

show, if it were needful to adduce instances of it, all the ordered

ranks of loftier intelligent beings, and all the powers and forces of

the universe. These are conceived of as an embattled host, comparable

to an army in the strictness of their discipline and their obedience to

a single will. It is the modern thought that the universe is a Cosmos

and not a Chaos, an ordered unit, with the addition of the truth beyond

the reach and range of science, that its unity is the expression of a

personal will. It is the same thought which the centurion had, to

Christ's wonder, when he compared his own power as an officer in a

legion, where his will was implicitly obeyed, to the power of Christ

over diseases and sorrows and miseries and death, and recognised that

all these were His servants, to whom, if His autocratic lips chose to

say Go,' they went, and if He said, Do this,' they did it.

So the Lord of the universe and its ordered ranks is Jesus Christ. That

is the truth which was flashed from the unknown, like a vanishing

meteor in the midnight, before the face of Joshua, and which stands

like the noonday sun, unsetting and irradiating for us who live under

the Gospel.

II. I see here the Leader of all the warfare against the world's evil.

The Captain of the Lord's host.' He Himself takes part in the fight. He

is not like a general who, on some safe knoll behind the army, sends

his soldiers to death, and keeps his own skin whole. But He has fought,

and He is fighting. Do you remember that wonderful picture in two

halves, at the end of one of the Gospels, the Lord went up into Heaven

and sat at the right hand of God, . . . they went forth everywhere

preaching the Word'? Strange contrast between the repose of the seated

Christ and the toils of His peripatetic servants! Yes, strange

contrast; but the next words harmonise the two halves of it; the Lord

also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.'

The Leader does not so rest as that He does not fight; and the servants

do not need so to fight, as that they cannot rest. Thus the old legends

of many a land and tongue have a glorious truth in them to the eye of

faith, and at the head of all the armies that are charging against any

form of the world's misery and sin, there moves the form of the Son of

Man, whose aid we have to invoke, even from His crowned repose at the

right hand of God. Gird thy sword upon Thy thigh, O Most Mighty, and in

Thy majesty ride forth prosperously, and Thy right hand shall teach

Thee terrible things.'

If this, then, be for us, as truly as for Joshua and his host, a

revelation of who is our true leader, surely all of us in our various

degrees, and especially any of us who have any Quixotic crusade' for

the world's good on our consciences and on our hands, may take the

lessons and the encouragements that are here. Own your Leader; that is

one plain duty. And recognise this fact, that by no other power than by

His, and with no other weapons than those which He puts into our hands,

in His Cross and meekness, can a world's evils be overcome, and the

victory be won for the right and the truth. I have no faith in crusades

which are not under the Captain of our salvation. And I would that the

earnest men, and there are many of them, the laborious and the

self-sacrificing men in many departments of philanthropy and

benevolence and social reformation--who labour unaware of who is their

Leader, and not dependent upon His help, nor trusting in His

strength--would take to heart this vision of my text, and see beside

them the man with the drawn sword in his hand,' the Christ with the

sharp two-edged sword going out of his mouth,' by whom, and by whom

alone, the world's evil can be overcome and slain.

Own your General; submit to His authority; pick the weapons that He can

bless; trust absolutely in His help. We may have, we shall have, in all

enterprises for God and man that are worth doing, need of patience,'

just as the army of Israel had to parade for six weary days round

Jericho blowing their useless trumpets, whilst the impregnable walls

stood firm, and the defenders flouted and jeered their aimless

procession. But the seventh day will come, and at the trumpet blast

down will go the loftiest ramparts of the cities that are walled up to

heaven' with a rush and a crash, and through the dust and over the

ruined rubbish Christ's soldiers will march and take possession. So

trust in your Leader, and be sure of the victory, and have patience and

keep on at your work.

Do not make Joshua's mistake. Art Thou for us?'--Nay! Thou art for me.'

That is a very different thing. We have the right to be sure that God

is on our side, when we have made sure that we are on God's. So take

care of self-will and self-regard, and human passions, and all the

other parasitical insects that creep round philanthropic religious

work, lest they spoil your service. There is a great deal that calls

itself after Jehu's fashion, My zeal for the Lord,' which is nothing

better than zeal for my own notions and their preponderance. Therefore

we must strip ourselves of all that, and not fancy that the cause is

ours, and then graciously admit Christ to help us, but recognise that

it is His, and lowly submit ourselves to His direction, and what we do,

do, and when we fight, fight, in His name and for His sake.

III. Here is the Ally in all our warfare with ourselves.

That is the worst fight. Far worse than all these Hittites and Hivites,

and the other tribes with their barbarous names, far worse than all

external foes, are the foes that each man carries about in his own

heart. In that slow hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot struggle I do not

believe that there is any conquering power available for a man that can

for a moment be compared with the power that comes through submission

to Christ's command and acceptance of Christ's help. He has fought

every foot of the ground before us. We have to run the race'--to take

another metaphor--that is set before us, looking unto Jesus,' the great

Leader, and in His own self the Perfecter of the faith which conquers.

In Him, His example, the actual communication of His divine Spirit, and

in the motives for brave and persistent conflict which flow from His

Cross and Passion, we shall find that which alone will make us the

victors in this internecine warfare. There can be no better directory

given to any man than to tread in Christ's footsteps, and learn how to

fight, from Him who in the wilderness repelled the triple assault with

the single It is written'; thus recognising the word and will of God as

the only directory and defence.

Thus, brethren, if we humbly take service in His ranks, and ask Him to

show us where our foes within are, and to give us the grace to grapple

with them, and cast them out, anything is possible rather than ultimate

defeat, and however long and sore the struggle may be, its length and

its severity are precious parts of the discipline that makes us strong,

and we shall at last be more than conquerors through Him that loveth

us.

IV. Lastly, I see here the Power which it is madness to resist.

Think of this vision. Think of the deep truths, partially shadowed and

symbolised by it. Think of Christ, what He is, and what resources He

has at His back, of what are His claims for our service, and our loyal,

militant obedience. Think of the certain victory of all who follow Him

amongst the armies of Heaven, clad in fine linen, clean and white.'

Think of the crown and the throne for him that overcomes.'

Remember the destructive powers that sleep in Him: the drawn sword in

His hand,' the two-edged sword out of His mouth' the wrath of the

Lamb.' Think of the ultimate certain defeat of all antagonisms; of that

last campaign when He goes forth with the name written on His vesture

and on His thigh "King of kings and Lord of lords."' Think of how He

strikes through kings in the day of His wrath, and fills the place with

the bodies of the dead'; and how His enemies become His footstool.'

Ponder His own solemn word, He that is not with Me, is against Me.'

There is no neutrality in this warfare. Either we are for Him or we are

for His adversary. Under which King? speak or die!' As sensible men,

not indifferent to your highest and lasting well-being, ask yourselves,

Can I, with my ten thousand, meet Him with His twenty thousand?' Put

yourselves under His orders, and He will be on your side. He will teach

your hands to war, and your fingers to fight; will cover your heads in

the day of battle, and bring you at last, palm-bearing and

laurel-crowned, to that blissful state where there will still be

service, and He still be the Captain of the Lord's host,' but where

swords will be beaten into ploughshares' and the victors shall need to

learn war no more.'

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THE SIEGE OF JERICHO

And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor

make any noise with your voice, . . . until the day I bid you shout;

then shall ye shout. 11. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city,

going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the

camp.'--JOSHUA vi. 10, 11.

The cheerful uniform obedience of Israel to Joshua stands in very

remarkable contrast with their perpetual murmurings and rebellions

under Moses. Many reasons probably concurred in bringing about this

change of tone. For one thing the long period of suspense was over; and

to average sense-bound people there is no greater trial of faith and

submission than waiting, inactive, for something that is to come. Now

they are face to face with their enemies, and it is a great deal easier

to fight than to expect; and their courage mounts higher as dangers

come nearer. Then there were great miracles which left their impression

upon the people, such as the passage of the Jordan, and so on.

So that the Epistle to the Hebrews is right when it says, By faith the

walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days.'

And that faith was as manifest in the six days' march round the city,

as on the seventh day of victorious entrance. For, if you will read the

narrative carefully, you will see that it says that the Israelites were

not told what was to be the end of that apparently useless and aimless

promenade. It was only on the morning of the day of the miracle that it

was announced. So there are two stages in this instance of faith. There

is the protracted trial of it, in doing an apparently useless thing;

and there is the victory, which explains and vindicates it. Let us look

at these two points now.

I. Consider that strange protracted trial of faith.

The command comes to the people, through Joshua's lips, unaccompanied

by any explanation or reasons. If Moses had called for a like obedience

from the people in their wilderness mood, there would have been no end

of grumbling. But whatever some of them may have thought, there is

nothing recorded now but prompt submission. Notice, too, the order of

the procession. First come the armed men, then seven white-robed

priests, blowing, probably, discordant music upon their ram's horn

trumpets; then the Ark, the symbol and token of God's presence; and

then the rereward. So the Ark is the centre; and it is not only Israel

that is marching round the city, but rather it is God who is circling

the walls. Very impressive would be the grim silence of it all. Tramp,

tramp, tramp, round and round, six days on end, without a word spoken

(though no doubt taunts in plenty were being showered down from the

walls), they marched, and went back to the camp, and subsided into

inactivity for another four-and-twenty hours, until they turned out'

for the procession once more.

Now, what did all that mean? The blast of the trumpet was, in the

Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And

hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating Jericho was

to declare Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible

cordon and network around the doomed city.' In fact the meaning of the

procession, emphasised by the silence of the soldiers, was that God

Himself was saying, in the long-drawn blasts of the priestly trumpet,

Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting

doors; and the King of Glory shall come in.' Now, whatever Jericho and

its people thought about that, Israel, according to the commentary of

the New Testament, had to some extent, at all events, learnt the

lesson, and knew, of course very rudimentarily and with a great deal of

mere human passion mingled with it, but still knew, that this was God's

summons, and the manifestation of God's presence. And so round the city

they went, and day by day they did the thing in which their faith

apprehended its true meaning, and which, by reason of their faith, they

were willing to do. Let us take some lessons from that.

Here is a confidence in the divine presence, manifested by

unquestioning obedience to a divine command.

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why.'

Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes! up

with the Ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the

march! It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the

tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The sceptical

spirit in the host--the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren

living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable

duties are crammed up against their faces--would have enough to say on

that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now,

we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to

practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common-sense

about the things that seem to us to be duties.

But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian

language, the will of our Father in heaven, then everything is settled;

and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning

submission, active submission, or, what is as hard, passive submission.

Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was

altogether ignorant of what was coming. I think that is quite plain in

the story, if you will read it carefully, though I think that it is not

quite what people generally understand as its meaning. But it makes the

incident more in accordance with God's uniform way of dealing with us

that the host should be told on the morning of the first day of the

week that they were to march round the city, and told the same on the

second day, and on the third the same, and so on until the sixth; and

that not until the morning of the seventh, were they told what was to

be the end of it all. That is the way in which God generally deals with

us. In the passage of the Jordan, too, you will find, if you will look

at the narrative carefully, that although Joshua was told what was

coming, the people were not told till the morning of the day, when the

priests' feet were dipped in the brink of the water. We, too, have to

do our day's march, knowing very little about tomorrow; and we have to

carry on all through life doing the duty that lies nearest us,'

entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. Life

is like a voyage down some winding stream, shut in by hills, sometimes

sunny and vine-clad, like the Rhine, sometimes grim and black, like an

American canon. As the traveller looks ahead he wonders how the stream

will find a passage beyond the next bend; and as he looks back, he

cannot trace the course by which he has come. It is only when he rounds

the last shoulder that he sees a narrow opening flashing in the

sunshine, and making a way for his keel. So, seeing that we know

nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing

that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the

next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as

full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple

faith in Him. He does not open His whole hand at once; He opens a

finger at a time, as you do sometimes with your children when you are

trying to coax them to take something out of the palm. He gives us

enough light for the moment, He says, March round Jericho; and be sure

that I mean something. What I do mean I will tell you some day.' And so

we have to put all into His hands.

Then here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week

was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one

apparently useless thing and nothing else. It would take about an hour

or so to march round the city, and there were twenty-three hours of

idleness. Little progress in reducing Jericho was made by the progress

round it, and it must have got rather wearisome about the sixth day.

Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly

influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily

round. Let us not be weary in well-doing,' for there is a time for

everything. There is a time for sowing and for reaping, and in the

season of the reaping we shall reap, if we faint not.' Dear brethren!

we all get weary of our work. Custom presses upon us, with a weight

heavy as frost, and deep almost as life.' It is easy to do things with

a spurt, but it is the keeping on at the monotonous, trivial, and

sometimes unintelligible duties that is the test of a man's grit, and

of his goodness too. So, although it is a very, very threadbare lesson

--one that you may think it was not worth while for me to bring you all

here to receive--I am sure that there are few things needed more by us

all, and especially by those of us who are on the wrong side of middle

life, as people call it--though I think it is the right side in many

respects--than that old familiar lesson. Keep on as you have begun, and

for the six weary days turn out, however hot the sun, however

comfortable the carpets in the tent, however burning the sand, however

wearisome and flat it may seem to be perpetually tramping round the

same walls of the same old city; keep on, for in due season the trumpet

will sound and the walls will fall.

II. So that brings me to the second stage--viz., the sudden victory

which vindicates and explains the protracted trial of faith.

I do not need to tell the story of how, on the seventh day, the host

encompassed the city seven times, and at last they were allowed to

break the long silence with a shout. You will observe the prominence

given to the sacred seven, both in the number of days, of circuits

made, and the number of the priests' trumpets. Probably the last day

was a Sabbath, for there must have been one somewhere in the week, and

it is improbable that it was one of the undistinguished days. That was

a shout, we may be sure, by which the week's silence was avenged, and

all the repressed emotions gained utterance at last. The fierce yell

from many throats, which startled the wild creatures in the hills

behind Jericho, blended discordantly with the trumpets' clang which

proclaimed a present God; and at His summons the fortifications toppled

into hideous ruin, and over the fallen stones the men of Israel

clambered, each soldier, in all that terrible circle of avengers that

surrounded the doomed city, marching straight forward, and so all

converging on the centre.

Now, we can discover good reasons for this first incident in the

campaign being marked by miracle. The fact that it was the first is a

reason. It is a law of God's progressive revelation that each new epoch

is inaugurated by miraculous works which do not continue throughout its

course. For instance, it is observable that, in the Acts of the

Apostles, the first example of each class of incidents recorded there,

such as the first preaching, the first persecution, the first

martyrdom, the first expansion of the Gospel beyond Jews, its first

entrance into Europe, has usually the stamp of miracle impressed on it,

and is narrated at great length, while subsequent events of the same

class have neither of those marks of distinction. Take, for example,

the account of Stephen, the first martyr. He saw the heavens opened'

and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.' We do not read

that the heavens opened when Herod struck off the head of James with

the sword. But was Jesus any the less near to help His servant?

Certainly not.

In like manner it was fitting that the first time that Israel crossed

swords with these deadly and dreaded enemies should be marked by a

miraculous intervention to hearten God's warriors. But let us take care

that we understand the teaching of any miracle. Surely it does not

secularise and degrade the other incidents of a similar sort in which

no miracle was experienced. The very opposite lesson is the true one to

draw from a miracle. In its form it is extraordinary, and presents

God's direct action on men or on nature, so obviously that all eyes can

see it. But the conclusion to be drawn is not that God acts only in a

supernatural' manner, but that He is acting as really, though in a less

obvious fashion, in the natural' order. In these turning-points, the

inauguration of new stages in revelation or history, the cause which

always produces all nearer effects and the ultimate effects, which are

usually separated or united (as one may choose to regard it) by many

intervening links, are brought together. But the originating power

works as truly when it is transmitted through these many links as when

it dispenses with them. Miracle shows us in abbreviated fashion, and

therefore conspicuously, the divine will acting directly, that we may

see it working when it acts indirectly. In miracle God makes bare His

arm,' that we may be sure of its operation when it is draped and

partially hid, as by a vesture, by second causes.

We are not to argue that, because there is no miracle, God is not

present or active. He was as truly with Israel when there was no Ark

present, and no blast of the trumpet heard. He was as truly with Israel

when they fought apparently unhelped, as He was when Jericho fell. The

teaching of all the miracles in the Old and the New Testaments is that

the order of the universe is maintained by the continual action of the

will of God on men and things. So this story is a transient revelation

of an eternal fact. God is as much with you and me in our fights as He

was with the Israelites when they marched round Jericho, and as

certainly will He help. If by faith we endure the days of often blind

obedience, we shall share the rapture of the sudden victory.

Now, I have said that the last day of this incident was probably a

Sabbath day. Does not that suggest the thought that we may take this

story as a prophetic symbol? There is for us a week of work, and a

seventh day of victory, when we shall enter, not into the city of

confusion which has come to nought, but into the city which hath the

foundations, whose builder and maker is God.' The old fathers of the

Christian Church were not far wrong, when they saw in this story a type

of the final coming of the Lord. Did you ever notice how St. Paul, in

writing to the Thessalonians about that coming, seems to have his mind

turned back to the incident before us? Remember that in this incident

the two things which signalised the fall of the city were the trumpet

and the shout. What does Paul say? The Lord Himself shall descend from

heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the

trump of God.' Jericho over again! And then, Babylon is fallen, is

fallen!' And I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, like a

bride adorned for her husband.'

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RAHAB

And Joanna paved Rahab the harlot alive. . . and she dwelleth in Israel

even unto this day.'--JOSHUA vi. 25.

This story comes in like an oasis in these terrible narratives of

Canaanite extermination. There is much about it that is beautiful and

striking, but the main thing is that it teaches the universality of

God's mercy, and the great truth that trust in Him unites to Him and

brings deliverance, how black soever may have been the previous life.

I need not tell over again the story, told with such inimitable

picturesqueness here: how the two spies, swimming the Jordan in flood,

set out on their dangerous mission and found themselves in the house of

Rahab, a harlot; how the king sent to capture them, how she hid them

among the flax-stalks bleaching on the flat roof, confessed faith in

Israel's God and lied steadfastly to save them, how they escaped to the

Quarantania hills, how she perished not' in the capture, entered into

the community of Israel, was married, and took her place--hers!--in the

line of David's and Christ's ancestresses.

The point of interest is her being, notwithstanding her previous

position and history, one of the few instances in which heathen were

brought into Israel. The Epistle to the Hebrews and James both refer to

her. We now consider her story as embodying for us some important

truths about faith in its nature, its origin, its power.

I. Faith in its constant essence and its varying objects.

Her creed was very short and simple. She abjured idols, and believed

that Jehovah was the one God. She knew nothing of even the Mosaic

revelation, nothing of its moral law or of its sacrifices. And yet the

Epistle to the Hebrews has no scruple in ascribing faith to her. The

object of that Epistle is to show that Christianity is Judaism

perfected. It labours to establish that objectively there has been

advance, not contradiction, and that subjectively there is absolute

identity. It has always been faith that has bound men to God. That

faith may co-exist with very different degrees of illumination. Not the

creed, but the trust, is the all-important matter. This applies to all

pre-Christian times and to all heathen lands. Our faith has a fuller

gospel to lay hold of. Do not neglect it.

Beware lest people with less light and more love get in before you, who

shall come from the east and the west.'

II. Faith in its origin in fear.

There are many roads to faith, and it matters little which we take, so

long as we get to the goal. This is one, and some people seem to think

that it is a very low and unworthy one, and one which we should never

urge upon men. But there are a side of the divine nature and a mode of

the divine government which properly evoke fear.

God's moral government, His justice and retribution, are facts.

Fear is an inevitable and natural consequence of feeling that His

justice is antagonistic to us. The work of conscience is precisely to

create such fear. Not to feel it is to fall below manhood or to be

hardened by sin.

That fear is meant to lead us to God and love. Rahab fled to God. Peter

girt his fisher's coat to him,' and lost his fear in the sunshine of

Christ's face, as a rainbow trembles out of a thunder-cloud when

touched by sunbeams.

We have all grounds enough to fear.

Urge these as a reason for trust.

III. Faith in its relation to the previous life.

It is a strange instance of blindness that attempts have been made to

soften down the Bible's plain speaking about Rahab's character.

In her story we have an anticipation of New Testament teaching.

The woman that was a sinner.'

Mary Magdalene.

Then drew near all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him.'

She shows us that there is no hopeless guilt. None is so in regard to

the effects of sin on a soul. There is no heart so indurated as that

its capacity for being stirred by the divine message is killed.

There is none hopeless in regard to God.

His love embraces all, however bad. The bond which unites to Him is not

blamelessness of life but simple trust.

The grossest vice is not so thorough a barrier as self-satisfied

self-righteousness.

A thin slice of crystal will bar the entrance of air more effectually

than many folds of stuff.

IV. Faith in its practical effects.

Rahab's story shows how living faith, like a living stream, will cut a

channel for itself, and must needs flow out into the life.

Hence James is right in using her as an example of how we are justified

by works and not by faith only,' and the author of the Epistle to the

Hebrews is equally right in enrolling her in his great muster-roll of

heroes and heroines of faith, and asserting that by faith' she perished

not among them who believed not.' The one writer fastens on a later

stage in her experience than does the other. James points to the rich

fruit, the Epistle to the Hebrews goes deeper and lays bare the root

from which the life rose to the clusters.

The faith that saves is not a barren intellectual process, nor an idle

trust in Christ's salvation, but a practical power. If genuine it will

mould and impel the life.

So Rahab's faith led her, as ours, if real, will lead us, to break with

old habits and associations contrary to itself. She ceased to be Rahab

the harlot,' she forsook her own people and her father's house.' But

her conquest of her old self was gradual. A lie was a strange kind of

first-fruits of faith. Its true fruit takes time to flower and swell

and come to ripeness and sweetness.

So we should not expect old heads on young shoulders, nor wonder if

people, lifted from the dunghills of the world, have some stench and

rags of their old vices hanging about them still. That thought should

moderate our expectations of the characters of converts from

heathenism, or from the degraded classes at home. And it should be

present to ourselves, when we find in ourselves sad recurrences of

faults and sins that we know should have been cast out, and that we

hoped had been so.

This thought enhances our wondering gratitude for the divine

long-suffering which bears with our slow progress. Our great Teacher

never loses patience with His dull scholars.

V. Faith as the means of deliverance and safety.

From external evils it delivers us or not, as God may will. James was

no less dear, and no less faithful, than John, though he was early

slain with the sword,' and his brother died in extreme old age in

Ephesus. Paul looked forward to being delivered from every evil work,'

though he knew that the time of his being offered' was at hand, because

the deliverance that he looked for was his being saved into His

heavenly kingdom.'

That true deliverance is infallibly ours, if by faith we have made the

Deliverer ours.

There is a more terrible fall of a worse city than Jericho, in that day

when the city of the terrible ones shall be laid low,' and our Joshua

brings it to the ground, even to the dust.' In that same day shall this

song be sung in the land of Judah: we have a strong city, salvation

will God appoint for walls and bulwarks,' and into that eternal home He

will certainly lead all who are joined to Him, and separated from their

foul old selves, and from the city of destruction,' by faith in Him.

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ACHAN'S SIN, ISRAEL'S DEFEAT

But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing:

for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the

tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the Lord

was kindled against the children of Israel. 2. And Joshua sent men from

Jericho to Ai, which is beside Beth-aven, on the east side of Beth-ei,

and spake unto them, saying, Go up and view the country. And the men

went up and viewed Ai. 3. And they returned to Joshua, and said unto

him, Let not all the people go up; but let about two or three thousand

men go up and smite Ai; and make not all the people to labour thither;

for they are but few. 4. So there went up thither of the people about

three thousand men: and they fled before the men of Ai. 5. And the men

of Ai smote of them about thirty and six men: for they chased them from

before the Irate even unto Shebarim, and smote them in the going down;

wherefore the hearts of the people melted, and became as water. 6. And

Joshua rent his clothes, and fell to the earth upon his face before the

ark of the Lord until the eventide, he and the elders of Israel, and

put dust upon their heads. 7. And Joshua said, Alas, O Lord God,

wherefore hast Thou at all brought this people over Jordan, to deliver

us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us? would to God we had

been content, and dwelt on the other side Jordan! 8. O Lord, what shall

I say, when Israel turneth their backs before their enemies! 9. For the

Canaanites, and all the inhabitants of the land shall hear of it, and

shall environ us round, and cut off our name from the earth: and what

wilt Thou do unto Thy great name? 10. And the Lord said unto Joshua,

Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face? 11. Israel hath

sinned, and they have also trangressed My covenant which I commanded

them: for they have even taken of the accursed thing, and have also

stolen, and dissembled also, and they have put it even among their own

stuff. 12. Therefore the children of Israel could not stand before

their enemies, but turned their backs before their enemies, because

they were accursed; neither will I be with you any more, except ye

destroy the accursed from among you.'--JOSHUA vii. 1-12.

This passage naturally parts itself into--1. The hidden sin (v. 1); 2.

The repulse by which it is punished (vs. 2-5); 3. The prayer of

remonstrance (vs. 6-9); and 4. The answer revealing the cause (vs.

10-12). We may briefly note the salient points in these four divisions,

and then consider the general lessons of the whole.

I. Observe, then, that the sin is laid at the doors of the whole

nation, while yet it was the secret act of one man. That Is a strange

for' in verse 1--the people did it; for' Achan did it. Observe, too,

with what bitter particularity his descent is counted back through

three generations, as if to diffuse the shame and guilt over a wide

area, and to blacken the ancestors of the culprit. Note also the

description of the sin. Its details are not given, but its inmost

nature is. The specification of the Babylonish garment,' the shekels of

silver,' and the wedge of gold,' is reserved for the sinner's own

confession; but the blackness of the deed is set forth in its principle

in verse 1. It was a breach of trust,' for so the phrase committed a

trespass' might be rendered. The expression is frequent in the

Pentateuch to describe Israel's treacherous departure from God, and has

this full meaning here. The sphere in which Achan's treason was

evidenced was in the devoted thing.' The spoil of Jericho was set aside

for Jehovah, and to appropriate any part of it was sacrilege. His sin,

then, was double, being at once covetousness and robbing God. Achan, at

the beginning of Israel's warfare for Canaan, and Ananias, at the

beginning of the Church's conquest of the world, are brothers alike in

guilt and in doom. Note the wide sweep of the anger of the Lord,'

involving in its range not only the one transgressor, but the whole

people.

II. All unconscious of the sin, and flushed with victory, Joshua let no

grass grow under his feet, but was prepared to push his advantage to

the utmost with soldierly promptitude. The commander's faith and

courage were contagious, and the spies came back from their perilous

reconnaissance of Ai with the advice that a small detachment was enough

for its reduction. They had not spied the mound in the middle of

Achan's tent, or their note would have been changed. Three thousand, or

three hundred, would have been enough, if God had been with them. The

whole army would not have been enough since He was not. The site of Ai

seems to have been satisfactorily identified on a small plateau among

the intricate network of wild wadys and bare hills that rise behind

Jericho. The valley to the north, the place where the ambush lay at the

successful assault, and a great mound, still bearing the name Et Tel'

(the heap), are all there. The attacking force does not seem to have

been commanded by Joshua. The ark stayed at Gilgal, The contempt for

the resistance likely to be met makes the panic which ensued the more

remarkable. What turned the hearts of the confident assailants to

water? There was no serious fighting, or the slaughter would have been

more than thirty-six. There went up . . . about three thousand and

they'--did what? fought and conquered? Alas, no, but they fled before

the men of Ai,' rushing in wild terror down the steep pass which they

had so confidently breasted in the morning, till the pursuers caught

them up at some quarries,' where, perhaps, the ground was difficult,

and there slew the few who fell, while the remainder got away by

swiftness of foot, and brought back their terror and their shame to the

camp. As the disordered fugitives poured in, they infected the whole

with their panic. Such unwieldy undisciplined hosts are peculiarly

liable to such contagious terror, and we find many instances in

Scripture and elsewhere of the utter disorganisation which ensues. The

whole conquest hung in the balance. A little more and the army would be

a mob; and the mob would break into twos and threes, which would get

short shrift from the Amorites.

Ill. Mark, then, Joshua's action in the crisis. He does not try to

encourage the people, but turns from them to God. The spectacle of the

leader and the elders prone before the ark, with rent garments and

dust-bestrewn hair, in sign of mourning, would not be likely to hearten

the alarmed people; but the defeat had clearly shown that something had

disturbed the relation to God, and the first necessity was to know what

it was. Joshua's prayer is perplexed, and not free from a wistful,

backward look, nor from regard to his own reputation; but the soul of

it is an earnest desire to know the wherefore' of this disaster. It

traces the defeat to God, and means really, Show me wherefore Thou

contendest with me.' No doubt it runs perilously near to repeating the

old complaints at Kadesh and elsewhere, which are almost verbally

reproduced in its first words. But the same things said by different

people are not the same; and Joshua's question is the voice of a faith

struggling to find footing, and his backward look is not because he

doubts God's power to help, or hankers after Egypt, but because he sees

that, for some unknown reason, they have lost the divine protection.

His reference to himself betrays the crushing weight of responsibility

which he felt, and comes not from carefulness for his own good fame so

much as from his dread of being unable to vindicate himself, if the

people should turn on him as the author of their misfortunes. His fear

of the news of the check at Ai emboldening not only the neighbouring

Amorites (highlanders) of the western Palestine, but the remoter

Canaanites (lowlanders) of the coast, to make a combined attack, and

sweep Israel out of existence, was a perfectly reasonable forecast of

what would follow. The naive simplicity of the appeal to God, What wilt

Thou do for Thy great name?' becomes the soldier, whose words went the

shortest way to their aim, as his spear did. We cannot fancy this

prayer coming from Moses; but, for all that, it has the ring of faith

in it, and beneath its blunt, simple words throbs a true heart.

IV. The answer sounds strange at first. God almost rebukes him for

praying. He gives Joshua back his own wherefore' in the question that

sounds so harsh, Wherefore art thou thus fallen upon thy face?' but the

harshness is only apparent, and serves to point the lesson that

follows, that the cause of the disaster is with Israel, not with God,

and that therefore the remedy is not in prayer, but in active steps to

cast out the unclean thing.' The prayer had asked two things,--the

disclosure of the cause of God's having left them, and His return. The

answer lays bare the cause, and therein shows the conditions of His

return. Note the indignant accumulation of verbs in verse 11,

describing the sin in all its aspects. The first three of the six point

out its heinousness in reference to God, as sin, as a breach of

covenant, and as an appropriation of what was specially His. The second

three describe it in terms of ordinary morality, as theft, lying, and

concealment; so many black sides has one sin when God's eye scrutinises

it. Note, too, the attribution of the sin to the whole people, the

emphatic reduplication of the shameful picture of their defeat, the

singular transference to them of the properties of the devoted thing'

which Achan has taken, and the plain, stringent conditions of God's

return. Joshua's prayer is answered. He knows now why little Ai has

beaten them back. He asked, What shall I say?' He has got something of

grave import to say. So far this passage carries us, leaving the

pitiful last hour of the wretched troubler of Israel untouched. What

lessons are taught here?

First, God's soldiers must be pure. The conditions of God's help are

the same to-day as when that panic-stricken crowd ignominiously fled

down the rocky pass, foiled before an insignificant fortress, because

sin clave to them, and God was gone from them. The age of miracles may

have ceased, but the law of the divine intervention which governed the

miracles has not ceased. It is true to-day, and will always be true,

that the victories of the Church are won by its holiness far more than

by any gifts or powers of mind, culture, wealth, eloquence, or the

like. Its conquests are the conquests of an indwelling God, and He

cannot share His temples with idols. When God is with us, Jericho is

not too strong to be captured; when He is driven from us by our own

sin, Ai is not too weak to defeat us. A shattered wall keeps us out, if

we fight in our own strength. Fortifications that reach to heaven fall

flat before us when God is at our side. If Christian effort seems ever

fruitless, the first thing to do is to look for the Babylonish garment'

and the glittering shekels hidden in our tents. Nine times out of ten

we shall find the cause in our own spiritual deficiencies. Our success

depends on God's presence, and God's presence depends on our keeping

His dwelling-place holy. When the Church is fair as the moon,'

reflecting in silvery whiteness the ardours of the sun which gives her

all her light, and without such spots as dim the moon's brightness, she

will be terrible as an army with banners.' This page of Old Testament

history has a living application to the many efforts and few victories

of the churches of to-day, which seem scarce able to hold their own

amid the natural increase of population in so-called Christian lands,

and are so often apparently repulsed when they go up to attack the

outlying heathenism.

His strength was as the strength of ten,

Because his heart was pure,'

is true of the Christian soldier.

Again, we learn the power of one man to infect a whole community and to

inflict disaster on it. One sick sheep taints a flock. The effects of

the individual's sin are not confined to the doer. We have got a fine

new modern word to express this solemn law, and we talk now of

solidarity,' which sounds very learned and advanced.' But it means just

what we see in this story; Achan was the sinner, all Israel suffered.

We are knit together by a mystical but real bond, so that no man,' be

he good or bad, liveth to himself,' and no man's sin terminates in

himself. We see the working of that unity in families, communities,

churches, nations. Men are not merely aggregated together like a pile

of cannon balls, but are knit together like the myriad lives in a coral

rock. Put a drop of poison anywhere, and it runs by a thousand

branching veins through the mass, and tints and taints it all. No man

can tell how far the blight of his secret sins may reach, nor how wide

the blessing of his modest goodness may extend. We should seek to

cultivate the sense of being members of a great whole, and to ponder

our individual responsibility for the moral and religious health of the

church, the city, the nation. We are not without danger from an

exaggerated individualism, and we need to realise more constantly and

strongly that we are but threads in a great network, endowed with

mysterious vitality and power of transmitting electric impulses, both

of good and evil.

Again, we have one more illustration in this story of the well-worn

lesson,--never too threadbare to be repeated, until it is habitually

realised,--that God's eye sees the hidden sins. Nobody saw Achan carry

the spoil to his tent, or dig the hole to hide it. His friends walked

across the floor without suspicion of what was beneath. No doubt, he

held his place in his tribe as an honourable man, and his conscience

traced no connection between that recently disturbed patch on the floor

and the helter-skelter flight from Ai; but when the lot began to be

cast, he would have his own thought, and when the tribe of Judah was

taken, some creeping fear would begin to coil round his heart, which

tightened its folds, and hissed more loudly, as each step in the lot

brought discovery nearer home; and when, at last, his own name fell

from the vase, how terribly the thought would glare in on him,--And God

knew it all the while, and I fancied I had covered it all up so

safely.' It is an awful thing to hear the bloodhounds following up the

scent which leads them straight to our lurking-place. God's judgments

may be long in being put on our tracks, but, once loose, they are sure

of scent, and cannot be baffled. It is an old, old thought, Thou God

seest me'; but kept well in mind, it would save from many a sin, and

make sunshine in many a shady place.

Again, we have in Achan a lesson which the professing Christians of

great commercial nations, like England, sorely need. I have already

pointed out the singular parallel between him and Ananias and Sapphira.

Covetousness was the sin of all three. It is the sin of the Church

to-day. The whole atmosphere in which some of us live is charged with

the subtle poison of it. Men are estimated by their wealth. The great

aim of life is to get money, or to keep it, or to gain influence and

notoriety by spending it. Did anybody ever hear of church discipline

being exercised on men who committed Achan's sin? He was stoned to

death, but we set our Achans in high places in the Church. Perhaps if

we went and fell on our faces before the ark when we are beaten, we

should be directed to some tent where a very influential member' of

Israel lived, and should find that to put an end to his ecclesiastical

life had a wonderful effect in bringing back courage to the army, and

leading to more unmingled dependence on God. Covetousness was stoned to

death in Israel, and struck with sudden destruction in the Apostolic

Church. It has been reserved for the modern Church to tolerate and

almost to canonise it; and yet we wonder how it comes that we are so

often foiled before some little Ai, and so seldom see any walls falling

by our assault. Let us listen to that stern sentence, I will not be

with you any more, except ye destroy the devoted thing from among you.'

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THE SUN STAYED

Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon.'--JOSHUA x. 12.

The last time,' what a sad sound that has! In all minds there is a

shrinking from the last time of doing even some common act. The walk

down a street that we have passed every day for twenty years, and never

cared in the least about, and the very doorsteps and the children in

the streets, have an interest for us, as pensively we leave the

commonplace familiar scene.

On this last Sunday of another year, there comes a tone of sober

meditation over us, as we think that it is the last. I would fain let

the hour preach. I have little to say but to give voice to its lessons.

My text is only taken as a starting-point, and I shall say nothing

about Joshua and his prayer. I do not discuss whether this was a

miracle or not. It seems, at any rate, to be taken by the writer of the

story as one. What a picture he draws of the fugitives rushing down the

rocky pass, blind in their fear, behind them the flushed and eager

conqueror, the burst of the sudden tempest and far in the west the

crescent moon, the leader on the hilltop with his prayer for but one

hour or two more of daylight to finish the wild work so well begun!

And, says the story, his wish was granted, and no day has been like it

before or since, in which the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man.'

Once, and only once, did time seem to stand still; from the beginning

till now it has been going steadily on, and even then it only seemed to

stand. That day seemed longer, but life was passing all the same.

And so the first thought forced upon us here by our narrative and by

the season is the old one, so commonplace and yet so solemn.

I. Life inexorably slides away from us.

Once, and only once, it seemed to pause. How often since has Joshua's

prayer been prayed again! By the fearful,--the wretch to be hanged at

eight o'clock to-morrow morning, the man whom the next train will part

from all he loves. By the hopeful,--the child wearying for the

holidays, the bridegroom,

Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds!'

By the suffering,--

Would God it were evening!'

By the martyr amid the flames,

Come quickly, Lord Jesus!'

But all in vain. We cannot expand the moments to hours, nor compress

the hours to moments. Leaden or winged, the hours are hours. The

cold-blooded pendulum ticks on, equable and unaltered, and after sixty

minutes, no sooner and no later, the hour strikes. There is a time for

every purpose.'

How solemn is the thought of that constant process! It goes on for

ever, like the sea fog creeping up from the wide ocean and burying life

and sunshine in its fatal folds, or like the ever-flowing river, or

like the fall plunging over the edge of the cliff, or like the motions

of the midnight sky. Each moment in its turn passes into the colourless

stony past, and the shadow creeps up the hillside.

And how unnoticed it is! We only know motion by the jolts. The

revolution of the earth and its rush along its orbit are unfelt by us.

We are constantly startled to feel how long ago such and such a thing

took place. The mother sees her little girl at her knee, and in a few

days, as it seems, finds her a woman. How immense is our life in the

prospect, how awfully it collapses in the retrospect! Only by seeing

constellation after constellation set, do we know that the heavens are

in motion. We have need of an effort of serious reflection to realise

that it is of us and of our lives that all these old commonplaces are

true.

That constant, unnoticed progress has an end. Our life is a definite

period, having a bounded past behind it, a present, and a bounded

future before it. We have a sandglass and it runs out. We are like men

sliding down a rope or hauling a boat towards a fixed point. The sea is

washing away our sandy island, and is creeping nearer and nearer to

where we stand, and will wash over us soon. No cries, nor prayers, nor

wishes will avail. It is vain for us to say, Sun! stand thou still!'

II. Therefore our chief care should be to finish our work in our day.

Joshua had his day lengthened; we can come to the same result by

crowding ours with service. What is the purpose of life? Is it a shop?

or a garden? a school? No. Our chief end' is to become like God and a

little to help forward His cause. All is intended to develop character;

all life is disciplinary.

God's purpose should be our desire. That desire should mould all our

thoughts and acts. There should be no mere sentimental regrets for the

past, but the spirit of consecration should affect our thoughts about

it. There should be penitence, thankfulness, not vain mourning over

what is gone. There should be no waste or selfish use of the present.

What is it given us for but to use for God?

Strenuous work is the true way to lengthen each day. Time is infinitely

elastic. The noblest work is to do the works of Him that sent me.'

There should be no care for the future. It is in His hand. There will

be room in it for doing all His will.

Lord, it belongs not to my care,

Whether I die or live.'

III. If so, the passing day will have results that never pass.

Joshua's day was long enough for his work, and that work was a victory

which told on future generations. So life, short as it is, will be long

enough for all that we have to do and learn and be.

Christ's servant is immortal till his work is done.

God gives every man time enough for his salvation.

What may we bring out of life? Character, Christ-likeness, thankful

memories, union with God, capacity for heaven. The transient leaves the

abiding. The flood foams itself away, but deposits rich soil on the

plain.

IV. Thus the passing away of what must pass may become a joy.

Why should we be sad? There are reasons enough, as many sad, lonely

hearts among us know too well To some men dark thoughts of death and

judgment make the crumbling away of life too gloomy a fact to be

contemplated, but it may and should be calm joy to us that the weary

world ends and a blessed life begins. We may count the moments and see

them pass, as a bride watches the hours rolling on to her marriage

morning; not, indeed, without tremor and sadness at leaving her old

home, but yet with meek hope and gentle joy.

It is possible for men to see that life is but as a shadow that

declineth,' and yet to be glad. By faith in Christ, united to Him Who

is for ever and ever,' our souls shall triumph over death and thee, O

time.'

We need not cry, Sun! stand still!' but rather, Come quickly, Lord

Jesus!'

Then Time shall be the lackey to eternity,' and Death be the porter of

heaven's gate, and we shall pass from the land of setting suns and

waning moons and change and sorrow, to that land where thy sun shall no

more go down,' and there shall be no more time.'

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UNWON BUT CLAIMED

There remaineth yet very much land to be possessed, . . . them will I

drive out from before the children of Israel; only divide thou it by

lot unto Israel for an inheritance'--JOSHUA xiii. 1-8.

Joshua was now a very old man and had occupied seven years in the

conquest. His work was over, and now he had only to take steps to

secure the completion by others of the triumph which he would never

see. This incident has many applications to the work of the Church in

the world, but not less important ones to individual progress, and we

consider these mainly now.

I. The clear recognition of present imperfection.

That is essential in all regions, Not as though'; the higher up, the

more clearly we see the summit. The ideal grows loftier, as partially

realised. The mountain seems comparatively low and easy till we begin

to climb. We should be continually driven by a sense of our

incompleteness, and drawn by the fair vision of unattained

possibilities. In all regions, to be satisfied with the attained is to

cease to grow.

This is eminently so in the Christian life, with its goal of absolute

completeness.

How blessed this dissatisfaction is! It keeps life fresh: it is the

secret of perpetual youth.

Joshua's work was incomplete, as every man's must be. We each have our

limitations, the defects of our qualities, the barriers of our

environment, the brevity of our day of toil, and we have to be content

to carry the fiery cross a little way and then to give it up to other

hands. There is only One who could say,' It is done.' Let us see that

we do our own fragment.

II. The confident reckoning on complete possession.

Joshua's conquest was very partial. He subdued part of the central

mountain nucleus, but the low-lying stretch of country on the coast,

Philistia and the maritime plain up to Tyre and Sidon and other

outlying districts, remained unsubdued. Yet the whole land was now to

be allotted out to the tribes. That allotment must have strengthened

faith in their ultimate possession, and encouraged effort to make the

ideal a reality, and to appropriate as their own in fact what was

already theirs in God's purpose. So a great part of Christian duty, and

a great secret of Christian progress, is to familiarise ourselves with

the hope of complete victory. We should acquire the habit of

contemplating as certainly meant by God to be ours, complete conformity

to Christ's character, complete appropriation of Christ's gifts. God

bade Jeremiah buy a field that was in Anathoth' at the time an invading

army held the land. A Roman paid down money for the ground on which the

besiegers of Rome were encamped. It does not become Christians to be

less confident of victory. But we have to take heed that our confidence

is grounded on the right foundation. God's commandment to Joshua to

allot the land, even while the formidable foes enumerated in the

context held it firmly, was based on the assurance (verse 6): Them will

I drive out before the children of Israel.' Confidence based on self is

presumption, and will end in defeat; confidence based on God will brace

to noble effort, which is all the more vigorous and will surely lead to

victory, because it distrusts self.

III. The vigorous effort animated by both the preceding.

How the habit of thinking the unconquered land theirs would encourage

Israel. Efforts without hope are feeble; hope without effort is

fallacious.

Israel's history is significant. The land was never actually all

conquered. God's promises are all conditional, and if we do not work,

or if we work in any other spirit than in faith, we shall not win our

allotted part in the inheritance of the saints in light.' It is

possible to lose thy crow.' Work out your own salvation.' Trust in the

Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land.'

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CALEB--A GREEN OLD AGE

And Caleb. . . said unto him (Joshua), Thou knowest the thing that the

Lord said unto Moses the man of God concerning me and thee in

Kadesh-barnea.'--JOSHUA xiv. 6.

Five and forty years had passed since the Lord had said this thing.' It

was the promise to these two, now old men, of the prolongation of their

lives, and to Caleb of his inheritance in the land. Seven years of

fighting have been got through, and the preparations are being made for

the division of the land by lot. But, before that is done, it is

fitting that Caleb, whose portion had been specially secured to him by

that old promise, should have the promise specially recognised and

endorsed by the action of the leader, and independent of the operation

of the lot. So he appears before Joshua, accompanied by the head men of

his tribe, whose presence expresses their official consent to the

exceptional treatment of their tribesman, and urges his request in a

little speech, full of pathos and beauty and unconscious portraiture of

the speaker. I take it as a picture of an ideal old age, showing in an

actual instance how happy, vigorous, full of buoyant energy and

undiminished appetite for enterprise a devout old age may be. And my

purpose now is not merely to comment on the few words of our text, but

upon the whole of what falls from the lips of Caleb here.

I. I see then here, first, a life all built upon God's promise.

Five times in the course of his short plea with Joshua does he use the

expression the Lord spake.' On the first occasion of the five he unites

Joshua with himself as a recipient of the promise, Thou knowest the

thing that the Lord said concerning me and thee.' But in the other four

he takes it all to himself; not because it concerned him only, but

because his confidence, laying hold of the promise, forgot his brother

in the earnestness of his personal appropriation of it. And so,

whatsoever general words God speaks to the world, a true believer will

make them his very own; and when Christ says, God so loved the world

that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him

should not perish,' faith translates it into He loved me, and gave

Himself for me.' This is the first characteristic of a life built upon

the promise of God, that it lays its hand upon that promise and claims

it all for its very own.

Then notice, still further, how for all these forty-five years Caleb

had hid the word in his heart,' had lived upon it and thought about it

and believed it, and recognised the partial fulfilment of it, and

cherished the secret fire unknown to any besides. And now at last,

after so long an interval, he comes forward and stretches out a hand,

unweakened by the long delay, to claim the perfect fulfilment at the

end of his days. So the vision may tarry,' but a life based upon God's

promise has another estimate of swiftness and slowness than is current

amongst men who have only the years of earthly life to reckon by; and

that which to sense seems a long, weary delay, to faith seems but as a

watch in the night'. The world, which only measures time by its own

revolutions, has to lament over what seem to the sufferers long years

of pains and tears, but in the calendar of faith weeping endures for a

night, joy cometh in the morning.' The weary days dwindle into a point

when they are looked at with an eye that has been accustomed to gaze on

the solemn eternities of a promising and a faithful God. To it, as to

Him, a thousand years are as one day'; and one day,' in the

possibilities of divine favour and spiritual growth which it may

enfold, as a thousand years.' To the men who measure time as God

measures it, His help, howsoever long it may tarry, ever comes right

early.'

Further, note how this life, built upon faith in the divine promise,

was nourished and nurtured by instalments of fulfilment all along the

road. Two promises were given to Caleb--one, that his life should be

prolonged, and the other, that he should possess the territory into

which he had so bravely ventured. The daily fulfilment of the one fed

the fire of his faith in the ultimate accomplishment of the other, and

he gratefully recounts it now, as part of his plea with Joshua--Now,

behold, the Lord hath kept me alive as He spake, these forty and five

years, even since the Lord spake this word unto Moses. And now, lo! I

am this day fourscore and five years old.'

Whosoever builds his life on the promise of God has in the present the

guarantee of the better future. As we are journeying onwards to that

great fountain-head of all sweetness and felicity, there are ever

trickling brooks from it by the way, at which we may refresh our

thirsty lips and invigorate our fainting strength. The present

instalment carries with it the pledge of the full discharge of the

obligation, and he whose heart and hope is fixed with a forward look on

the divine inheritance, may, as he looks backward over all the years,

see clearly in them one unbroken mass of preserving providences, and

thankfully say, The Lord hath kept me alive, as He spake.'

And, still further, the life that is built upon faith like this man's,

is a life of buoyant hopefulness till the very end. The hopes of age

are few and tremulous. When the feast is nearly over, and the appetite

is dulled, there is little more to be done, but to push back our chairs

and go away. But God keeps the good wine' until the last. And when all

earthly hopes are beginning to wear thin and to burn dim, then the

great hope of the mountain of the inheritance' will rise brighter and

clearer upon our horizon. It is something to have a hope so far in

front of us that we never get up to it, to find it either less than our

expectations or more than our desires; and this is not the least of the

blessednesses of the living hope that maketh not ashamed,' that it lies

before us till the very end, and beckons and draws us across the gulf

of darkness. The Lord hath kept me alive, as He said; now give me this

mountain whereof the Lord spake.'

II. Further, I see here a life that bears to be looked back at.

Caleb becomes almost garrulous in telling over the old story of that

never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Joshua stood alone and tried to

put some heart into the cowardly mob before them. There is no mock

modesty about the man. He says that, amidst many temptations to be

untrue, he gave his report with sincerity and veracity, speaking as it

was in mine heart,' and then he quotes twice, with a permissible

satisfaction, the eulogium that had come upon him from the divine lips,

I wholly followed the Lord my God.' The private soldier's cheek may

well flush and his eye glitter as he repeats over again his general's

praise. And for Caleb, half a century has not dimmed the impression

that was made on his heart when he received that praise, through the

lips of Moses, from God.

Now, of course, such a tone of speaking about one's past savours of an

earlier stage in revelation than that in which we live, and, if this

were to be taken as a man's total account of his whole life, we could

not free it from the charge of unpleasing self-complacency and

self-righteousness. But for all that, it is not the same thing in the

retrospect whether you and I have to look back upon years that have

been given to self, and the world, and passion, and pride, and

covetousness, and frivolities and trifles of all sorts, or upon years

that in the main, and regard being had to their deepest desires and

governing direction, have been given to God and to His service. Many a

man looking back upon his life--I wonder if there are any such men

listening to me now--can only see such a sight as Abraham did on that

morning when he looked down on the plain of Sodom, and Lo! the smoke of

the land went up as the smoke of a furnace.' Dear friends I the only

thing that makes life in the retrospect tolerable is that it shall have

been given to God, and that we can say, I wholly followed the Lord my

God.'

III. Again, I see here a life which has discovered the secret of

perpetual youth.

I,' says the old man--am as strong this day as I was in the day when

Moses sent me. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for

war, both to go out and to come in.' For fighting, and for all the

intercourse and manifold activities of life, his sinews are as braced,

his eyes as clear, his spirit and limbs as alert as they were in those

old days. No doubt you will say that was due to miraculous

intervention. No doubt it was; but is it not true that, in a very real

sense, a man may keep himself young all his life, if he will go the

right way to work? And the secret of perpetual youthfulness lies here,

in giving our hearts to God and in living for Him. Christianity, with

its self-restraint and its exhortations to all, and especially to the

young, to be chaste and temperate and to subdue the animal passions,

has a direct tendency to conserve physical vigour; and Christianity, by

the inspiration that it imparts, the stimulus that it gives, and the

hopes that it permits us to cherish, has a direct tendency to keep

alive in old age all the best of the characteristics of youth. Its

buoyancy, its undimmed interest, its cheeriness, its freedom from

anxiety and care--all these things are directly ministered to, and

preserved by, a life of simple faith that casts itself upon God, and

dwells securely, in joy and in restfulness, and not without a great

light of hope, even when the shadows of evening are falling.

One of the greatest and most blessed of the characteristics of youth is

the consciousness that the most of life lies before us; and to a

Christian man, in any stage of his earthly life, that consciousness is

possible. When he stands on the verge of the last sinking sandbank of

time, and the water is up to his ankles, he may well feel that the best

and the most of life is yet to be.

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, "A whole I planned.

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid."'

They shall still bring forth fruit in old age, they shall be full of

sap and green.' A gnarled old tree may be green in all its branches,

and blossom and fruit may hang together there. The ideal of life is,

that into each stage we shall carry the best of the preceding,

harmonised with the best of the new, and that is possible to a

Christian soul. The fountain of perpetual youth, of which the ancients

fabled, is no fable, but a fact; and it rises, where the prophet in his

vision saw the stream coming out, from beneath the threshold of the

Temple door.

IV. So, lastly, I see here a beautiful example of a life which to the

last is ready for danger and enterprise.

Caleb's words as to his undiminished strength were not meant for a

boast. They express thankfulness and praise, and they are put as the

ground of the request that he has to make. He gives a chivalrous reason

for his petition when he says,' Now, therefore, give me this mountain,

for the Anakims (the giants) are there; and the cities great and

fenced.'

Caleb's readiness for one more fight was fed by his reliance on God's

help in it. When he says, It may be the Lord will be with me,' the

perhaps is that of humility, not of doubt. The old warrior's eye

flashes, and his voice sounds strong and full, as he ends his words

with I shall drive them out, as the Lord spake.' That has the true

ring. What were the three Anak chiefs, with their barbarous names,

Sheshai, and Ahiman, and Talmai, and their giant stature, to the onset

of a warrior faith like that? Of course, Caleb drove out thence the

three sons of Anak,' and Hebron became his inheritance. Nothing can

stand against us, if we seek for our portion, not where advantages are

greatest, but where difficulties and dangers are most rife, and cast

ourselves into the conflict, sure that God is with us, though humbly

wondering that we should be worthy of His all-conquering presence, and

sure, therefore, that victory marches by our sides.

Old age is generally much more disposed to talk about its past

victories than to fight new ones; to rest upon its arms, or upon its

laurels, than to undertake fresh conflicts. Now and then we see a man,

statesman or other, who, bearing the burden of threescore years and ten

lightly, is still as alert of spirit, as eager for work, as bold for

enterprise, as he was years before. And in nine cases out of ten such a

man is a Christian; and his brilliant energy of service is due, not

only, nor so much, to natural vigour of constitution as to religion,

which has preserved his vigour because it has preserved his purity, and

been to him a stimulus and an inspiration.

Danger is an attraction to the generous mind. It is the coward and the

selfish man who are always looking for an easy place, where somebody

else will do the work. This man felt that this miraculously prolonged

life of his bound him to special service, and the fact that up in

Hebron there were a fenced city and tall giants behind the battlements,

was an additional reason for picking out that bit of the field as the

place where he ought to be. Thank God, that spirit is not dead yet! It

has lived all through the Christian Church, and flamed up in times of

martyrdom. On missionary fields to-day, if one man falls two are ready

to step into his place. It is the true spirit of the Christian soldier.

A great door and effectual is opened,' says Paul, and there are many

adversaries.' He knew the door was opened because the adversaries were

many. And because there were so many of them, would he run away? Some

of us would have said: I must abandon that work, it bristles with

difficulties; I cannot stop in that post, the bullets are whistling too

fast.' Nay! says Paul; I abide till Pentecost'--a good long while--

because the post is dangerous, and promises to be fruitful.

So, dear friends, if we would have lives on which we can look back,

lives in which early freshness will last beyond the morning dew,' lives

in which there shall come, day by day and moment by moment, abundant

foretastes to stay our hunger until we sit at Christ's table in His

kingdom, we must follow the Lord alway,' with no half-hearted

surrender, nor partial devotion, but give ourselves to Him utterly, to

be guided and sent where He will. And then, like Caleb, we shall be

able to say, with a perhaps,' not of doubt, but of wonder, that it

should be so, to us unworthy, It may be the Lord will be with me, arid

I shall drive them out.' In all these things we are more than

conquerors through Him that loved us.'

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THE CITIES OF REFUGE

The Lord also spake unto Joshua, saying, 2. Speak to the children of

Israel, saying, Appoint out for you cities of refuge, whereof I spake

unto you by the hand of Moses: 3. That the slayer that killeth any

person unawares and unwittingly may flee thither: and they shall be

your refuge from the avenger of blood. 4. And when he that doth flee

unto one of those cities shall stand at the entering of the gate of the

city, and shall declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that

city, they shall take him into the city unto them, and give him a

place, that he may dwell among them. 5. And if the avenger of blood

pursue after him, then they shall not deliver the slayer up into his

hand; because he smote his neighbour unwittingly, and hated him not

beforetime. 6. And he shall dwell in that city, until he stand before

the congregation for judgment, and until the death of the high priest

that shall be in those days: then shall the slayer return, and come

unto his own city, and unto his own house, unto the city from whence he

fled. 7. And they appointed Kedesh in Galilee in mount Naphtali, and

Shechem in mount Ephraim, and Kirjath-arba, which is Hebron, in the

mountain of Judah. 8. And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward,

they assigned Bezer in the wilderness upon the plain out of the tribe

of Reuben, and Ramoth in Gilead out of the tribe of Gad, and Golan in

Bashan out of the tribe of Manasseh. 9. These were the cities appointed

for all the children of Israel, and for the stranger that sojourneth

among them, that whosoever killeth any person at unawares might flee

thither, and not die by the hand of the avenger of blood, until he

stood before the congregation.'--JOSHUA xx. 1-9.

Our Lord has taught us that parts of the Mosaic legislation were given

because of the hardness' of the people's hearts. The moral and

religious condition of the recipients of revelation determines and is

taken into account in the form and contents of revelation. That is

strikingly obvious in this institution of the cities of refuge.' They

have no typical meaning, though they may illustrate Christian truth.

But their true significance is that they are instances of revelation

permitting, and, while permitting, checking, a custom for the abolition

of which Israel was not ready.

I. Cities of refuge were needed, because the avenger of blood' was

recognised as performing an imperative duty. Blood for blood' was the

law for the then stage of civilisation. The weaker the central

authority, the more need for supplementing it with the wild justice of

personal avenging. Neither Israel nor surrounding nations were fit for

the higher commandment of the Sermon on the Mount. An eye for an eye,

and a tooth for a tooth,' corresponded to their stage of progress; and

to have hurried them forward to I say unto you, Resist not evil,' would

only have led to weakening the restraint on evil, and would have had no

response in the hearers' consciences. It is a commonplace that

legislation which is too far ahead of public opinion is useless, except

to make hypocrites. And the divine law was shaped in accordance with

that truth. Therefore the goel, or kinsman-avenger of blood, was not

only permitted but enjoined by Moses.

But the evils inherent in his existence were great. Blood feuds were

handed down through generations, involving an ever-increasing number of

innocent people, and finally leading to more murders than they

prevented. But the thing could not be abolished. Therefore it was

checked by this institution. The lessons taught by it are the gracious

forbearance of God with the imperfections attaching to each stage of

His people's moral and religious progress; the uselessness of violent

changes forced on people who are not ready for them; the presence of a

temporary element in the Old Testament law and ethics.

No doubt many things in the present institutions of so-called Christian

nations and in the churches are destined to drop away, as the

principles of Christianity become more clearly discerned and more

honestly applied to social and national life. But the good shepherd

does not overdrive his flock, but, like Jacob, leads on softly,

according to the pace of the cattle that is before' him. We must be

content to bring the world gradually to the Christian ideal. To abolish

or to impose institutions or customs by force is useless. Revolutions

made by violence never last. To fell the upas-tree maybe very heroic,

but what is the use of doing it, if the soil is full of seeds of

others, and the climate and conditions favourable to their growth?

Change the elevation of the land, and the `flora' will change itself.

Institutions are the outcome of the whole mental and moral state of a

nation, and when that changes, and not till then, do they change. The

New Testament in its treatment of slavery and war shows us the

Christian way of destroying evils; namely, by establishing the

principles which will make them impossible. It is better to girdle the

tree and leave it to die than to fell it.

II. Another striking lesson from the cities of refuge is the now

well-worn truth that the same act, when done from different motives, is

not the same. The kinsman-avenger took no heed of the motive of the

slaying. His duty was to slay, whatever the slayer's intention had

been. The asylum of the city of refuge was open for the unintentional

homicide, and for him only, Deliberate murder had no escape thither. So

the lesson was taught that motive is of supreme importance in

determining the nature of an act. In God's sight, a deed is done when

it is determined on, and it is not done, though done, when it was not

meant by the doer. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer,' and he

that killeth his brother unawares is none. We suppose ourselves to have

learned that so thoroughly that it is trivial to repeat the lesson.

What, then, of our thoughts and desires which never come to light in

acts? Do we recognise our criminality in regard to these as vividly as

we should? Do we regulate the hidden man of the heart accordingly? A

man may break all the commandments sitting in an easy-chair and doing

nothing. Von Moltke fought the Austro-Prussian war in his cabinet in

Berlin, bending over maps. The soldiers on the field were but pawns in

the dreadful game. So our battles are waged, and we are beaten or

conquerors, on the field of our inner desires and purposes. Keep thy

heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.'

III. The elaborately careful specification of cases which gave the

fugitive a right to shelter in the city is set forth at length in

Numbers xxxv. 15-24, and Deuteronomy xix. 4-13. The broad principle is

there laid down that the cities were open for one who slew a man

unwittingly.' But the plea of not intending to slay was held to be

negatived, not only if intention could be otherwise shown but if the

weapon used was such as would probably kill; such, for instance, as an

instrument of iron,' or a stone, or a weapon of wood, whereby a man may

die.' If we do what is likely to have a given result, we are

responsible for that result, should it come about, even though we did

not consciously seek to bring it. That is plain common sense. I never

thought the house would catch fire' is no defence from the guilt of

burning it down, if we fired a revolver into a powder barrel. Further,

if the fatal blow was struck in hatred,' or if the slayer had lain in

ambush to catch his victim, he was not allowed shelter. These careful

definitions freed the cities from becoming nests of desperate

criminals, as the sanctuaries' of the Middle Ages in Europe became.

They were not harbours for the guilty, but asylums for the innocent.

IV. The procedure by which the fugitive secured protection is described

at length in the passages cited, with which the briefer account here

should be compared. It is not quite free from obscurity, but probably

the process was as follows. Suppose the poor hunted man arrived panting

at the limits of the city, perhaps with the avenger's sword within half

a foot of his neck; he was safe for the time. But before he could enter

the city, a preliminary inquiry was held at the gate' by the city

elders. That could only be of a rough-and-ready kind; most frequently

there would be no evidence available but the man's own word. It,

however, secured interim protection. A fuller investigation followed,

and, as would appear, was held in another place,--perhaps at the scene

of the accident. The congregation' was the judge in this second

examination, where the whole facts would be fully gone into, probably

in the presence of the avenger. If the plea of non-intention was

sustained, the fugitive was restored to his city of refuge,' and there

remained safely till the death of the high-priest, when he was at

liberty to return to his home, and to stay there without fear.

Attempts have been made to find a spiritual significance in this last

provision of the law, and to make out a lame parallel between the death

of the high-priest, which cancelled the crime of the fugitive, and the

death of Christ, which takes away our sins. But--to say nothing of the

fact that the fugitive was where he was just because he had done no

crime--the parallel breaks down at other points. It is more probable

that the death of one high-priest and the accession of another were

regarded simply as closing one epoch and beginning another, just as a

king's accession is often attended with an amnesty. It was natural to

begin a new era with a clean sheet, as it were.

V. The selection of the cities brings out a difference between the

Jewish right of asylum and the somewhat similar right in heathen and

mediaeval times. The temples or churches were usually the sanctuaries

in these. But not the Tabernacle or Temple, but the priestly cities,

were chosen here. Their inhabitants represented God to Israel, and as

such were the fit persons to cast a shield over the fugitives; while

yet their cities were less sacred than the Temple, and in them the

innocent man-slayer could live for long years. The sanctity of the

Temple was preserved intact, the necessary provision for possibly

protracted stay was made, evils attendant on the use of the place of

worship as a refuge were avoided.

Another reason--namely, accessibility swiftly from all parts of the

land--dictated the choice of the cities, and also their number and

locality. There were three on each side of Jordan, though the

population was scantier on the east than on the west side, for the

extent of country was about the same. They stood, roughly speaking,

opposite each other,--Kedesh and Golan in the north, Shechem and Ramoth

central, Hebron and Bezer in the south. So, wherever a fugitive was, he

had no long distance between himself and safety.

We too have a strong city' to which we may continually resort.' The

Israelite had right to enter only if his act had been inadvertent, but

we have the right to hide ourselves in Christ just because we have

sinned wilfully. The hurried, eager flight of the man who heard the

tread of the avenger behind him, and dreaded every moment to be struck

to the heart by his sword, may well set forth what should be the

earnestness of our flight to lay hold on the hope set before us in the

gospel.' His safety, as soon as he was within the gate, and could turn

round and look calmly at the pursuer shaking his useless spear and

grinding his teeth in disappointment, is but a feeble shadow of the

security of those who rest in Christ's love, and are sheltered by His

work for sinners. I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never

perish, and no one shall pluck them out of My hand.'

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THE END OF THE WAR

And the Lord gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give unto

their fathers; and they possessed it, and dwelt therein. 44. And the

Lord gave them rest round about, according to all that He sware unto

their fathers: and there stood not a man of all their enemies before

them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. 45. There

failed not ought of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the

house of Israel; all came to pass.

Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half-tribe

of Manasseh, 2. And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses, the

servant of the Lord commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that

I commanded you: 3. Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto

this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the Lord your

God. 4. And now the Lord your God hath given rest unto your brethren,

as He promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your

tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of

the Lord gave you on the other side Jordan. 5. But take diligent heed

to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the Lord

charged you, to love the Lord your God, and to walk in all His ways,

and to keep His commandments, and to cleave unto Him, and to serve Him

with all your heart, and with all your soul. 6. So Joshua blessed them,

and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. 7. Now to the one

half of the tribe of Manasseh Moses had given possession in Bashan: but

unto the other half thereof gave Joshua among their brethren on this

side Jordan westward. And when Joshua sent them away also unto their

tents, then he blessed them, 8. And he spake unto them, saying, Return

with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle, with

silver, and with gold, and with brass, and with iron, and with very

much raiment: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren. 9.

And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half-tribe

of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of

Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of

Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed,

according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.'--JOSHUA xxi.

43-45; xxii. 1-9.

The old order changeth, giving place to new.' In this passage we have

the breaking up of the congregation and the disbanding of the

victorious army. The seven years of fighting had come to an end. The

swords were to be beaten into plowshares,' and the comrades who had

marched shoulder to shoulder, and shared the fierce excitement of many

a bloody field, were to be scattered, each becoming a peaceful farmer

or shepherd. A picturesque historian, of the modern special

correspondent' sort, would have overlaid the narrative with sentiment

and description; but how quietly the writer tells it, so that we have

to bethink ourselves before we apprehend that we are reading the

account of an epoch-making event! He fixes attention on two things,--

the complete fulfilment of God's promises (xxi. 43-45) and the

dismissal to their homes of the contingent from the trans-Jordanic

tribes, whose departure was the signal that the war was ended (xxii.

1-8). We may consider the lessons from these two separately.

I. The triumphant record of God's faithfulness (xxi. 43-45). These

three verses are the trophy reared on the battlefield, like the lion of

Marathon, which the Greeks set on its sacred soil. But the only name

inscribed on this monument is Jehovah's. Other memorials of victories

have borne the pompous titles of commanders who arrogated the glory to

themselves; but the Bible knows of only one conqueror, and that is God.

The help that is done on earth, He doeth it all Himself.' The military

genius and heroic constancy of Joshua, the eagerness for perilous

honour that flamed, undimmed by age, in Caleb, the daring and strong

arms of many a humble private in the ranks, have their due recognition

and reward; but when the history that tells of these comes to sum up

the whole, and to put the philosophy' of the conquest into a sentence,

it has only one name to speak as cause of Israel's victory.

That is the true point of view from which to look at the history of the

world and of the church in the world. The difference between the

miraculous' conquest of Canaan and the ordinary' facts of history is

not that God did the one and men do the other; both are equally, though

in different methods, His acts. In the field of human affairs, as in

the realm of nature, God is immanent, though in the former His working

is complicated by the mysterious power of man's will to set itself in

antagonism to His; while yet, in manner insoluble to us, His will is

supreme. The very powers which are arrayed against Him are His gift,

and the issues which they finally subserve are His appointment. It does

not need that we should be able to pierce to the bottom of the

bottomless in order to attain and hold fast by the great conviction

that there is no power but of God,' and that from Him are all things,

and to Him are all things.'

Especially does this trophy on the battlefield teach a needful lesson

to us in the Christian warfare. We are ever apt to think too much of

our visible weapons and leaders, and to forget our unseen and

ever-present Commander, from whom comes all our power. We burn incense

to our own net, and sacrifice to our own drag,' and, like the heathen

conqueror of whom Habakkuk speaks, make our swords our gods (Hab. i.

11, 16). The Church has always been prone to hero-worship, and to the

idolatry of its organisation, its methods, or its theology. Augustine

did so and so; Luther smote the whited wall' (the Pope) a blow that

made him reel; the Pilgrim Fathers carried a slip of the plant of

religious liberty in a tiny pot across the Atlantic, and watered it

with tears till it has grown a great tree; the Wesleys revived a formal

Church,--let us sing hallelujahs to these great names! By all means;

but do not let us forget whence they drew their power; and let us

listen to Paul's question, Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but

servants through whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?'

And let us carve, deep-cut and indelible, in solitary conspicuousness,

on the trophy that we rear on each well-fought field, the name of no

man save Jesus only.' We read that on a pyramid in Egypt the name and

sounding titles of the king in whose reign it was erected were blazoned

on the plaster facing, but beneath that transitory inscription the name

of the architect was hewn, imperishable, in the granite, and stood out

when the plaster dropped away. So, when all the short-lived records

which ascribe the events of the Church's progress to her great men have

perished, the one name of the true builder will shine out, and at the

name of Jesus every knee shall bow.' Let us not rely on our own skill,

courage, talents, orthodoxy, or methods, nor try to build tabernacles'

for the witnessing servants beside the central one for the supreme

Lord, but ever seek to deepen our conviction that Christ, and Christ

only, gives all their powers to all, and that to Him, and Him only, is

all victory to be ascribed. That is an elementary and simple truth; but

if we really lived in its power we should go into the battle with more

confidence, and come out of it with less self-gratulation.

We may note, too, in these verses, the threefold repetition of one

thought, that of God's punctual and perfect fulfilment of His word. He

gave unto Israel all the land which He sware to give'; He gave them

rest, . . . according to all that He sware'; there failed not aught of

any good thing which the Lord had spoken.' It is the joy of thankful

hearts to compare the promise with the reality, to lay the one upon the

other, as it were, and to declare how precisely their outlines

correspond. The finished building is exactly according to the plans

drawn long before. God gives us the power of checking His work, and we

are unworthy to receive His gifts if we do not take delight in marking

and proclaiming how completely He has fulfilled His contract. It is no

small part of Christian duty, and a still greater part of Christian

blessedness, to do this. Many a fulfilment passes unnoticed, and many a

joy, which might be sacred and sweet as a token of love from His own

hand, remains common and unhallowed, because we fail to see that it is

a fulfilled promise. The eye that is trained to watch for God's being

as good as His word will never have long to wait for proofs that He is

so. Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall

understand the loving kindness of the Lord.' And to such a one faith

will become easier, being sustained by experience; and a present thus

manifestly studded with indications of God's faithfulness will merge

into a future still fuller of these. For it does not need that we

should wait for the end of the war to have many a token that His every

word is true. The struggling soldier can say, No good thing has failed

of all that the Lord has spoken.' We look, indeed, for completer

fulfilment when the fighting is done; but there are brooks by the way'

for the warriors in the thick of the fight, of which they drink, and,

refreshed, lift up the head.' We need not postpone this glad

acknowledgment till we can look back and down from the land of peace on

the completed campaign, but may rear this trophy on many a field,

whilst still we look for another conflict to-morrow.

II. The disbanding of the contingent from the tribes across Jordan

(xxii. 1-8). Forty thousand fighting men, of the tribes of Reuben, Gad,

and the half of Manasseh, had willingly helped in the conquest, leaving

their own newly-won homes on the eastern side of Jordan, and for seven

long years taking their share in the hardships and dangers of their

brethren. It was no small tax which they had thus cheerfully paid for

the sake of brotherly unity. Their aid had not only been valuable as

strengthening Joshua's force, but still more so as a witness of the

unbroken oneness of the nation, and of the sympathy which the tribes

already settled bore to the others. Politically, it was wise to

associate the whole people in the whole conquest; for nothing welds a

nation together like the glories of common victories and the

remembrance of common dangers survived. The separation of the

trans-Jordanic tribes by the rapid river, and by their pastoral life,

was a possible source of weakness, and would, no doubt, have led to

more complete severance, if it had not been for the uniting power of

the campaign. If the forty thousand had been quietly feeding sheep on

the uplands while their brethren were fighting among the stony hills of

Canaan, a great gulf would have opened between them. Even as it was,

the eastern tribes drifted somewhat away from the western; but the

disintegration would have been still more complete if no memories of

the war, when all Israel stood side by side, had lived on among them.

Their share in the conquest was not only a piece of policy,--it was the

natural expression of the national brotherhood. Even I Joshua had not

ordered their presence, it would have been impossible for them to stop

in their peacefulness and let their brethren bear the brunt of battle.

The law for us is the same as for these warriors. In the family, the

city, the nation, the Church, and the world, union with others binds us

to help them in their conflicts, and that especially if we are blessed

with secure possessions, while they have to struggle for theirs. We are

tempted to selfish lives of indulgence in our quiet peace, and

sometimes think it hard that we should be expected to buckle on our

armour, and leave our leisurely repose, because our brethren ask the

help of our arms. If we did as Reuben and Gad did, would there be so

many rich men who never stir a finger to relieve poverty, so many

Christians whose religion is much more selfish than beneficent? Would

so many souls be left to toil without help, to struggle without allies,

to weep without comforters, to wander in the dark without a guide? All

God's gifts in providence and in the Gospel are given that we may have

somewhat wherewith to bless our less happy brethren. The service of

man' is not the substitute for, but the expression of, Christianity.

Are we not kept here, on this side Jordan, away for a time from our

inheritance, for the very same reason that these men were separated

from theirs,--that we may strike some strokes for God and our fellows

in the great war? Dives, who lolls on his soft cushions, and has less

pity for Lazarus than the dogs have, is Cain come to life again; and

every Christian is either his brother's keeper or his murderer. Would

that the Church of to-day, with infinitely deeper and sacreder ties

knitting it to suffering, struggling humanity, had a tithe of the

willing relinquishment of legitimate possessions and patient

participation in the long campaign for God which kept these rude

soldiers faithful to their flag and forgetful of home and ease, till

their general gave them their discharge!

Note the commander's parting charge. They were about to depart for a

life of comparative separation from the mass of the nation. Their

remoteness and their occupations drew them away from the current of the

national life, and gave them a kind of quasi-independence. They would

necessarily be less directly under Joshua's control than the other

tribes were. He sends them away with one commandment, the Imperative

stringency of which is expressed by the accumulation of expressions in

verse 5. They are to give diligent heed to the law of Moses. Their

obedience is to be based on love to God, who is their God no less than

the God of the other tribes. It is to be comprehensive--they are to

walk in all His ways'; it is to be resolute--they are to cleave to

Him'; it is to be wholehearted and whole-souled service, that will be

the true bond between the separated parts of the whole. Independence so

limited will be harmless; and, however wide apart their paths may lie,

Israel will be one. In like manner the bond that knits all divisions of

God's people together, however different their modes of life and

thought, however unlike their homes and their work, is the similarity

of relation to God. They are one in a common faith, a common love, a

common obedience. Wider waters than Jordan part them. Graver

differences of tasks and outlooks than separated these two sections of

Israel part them. But all are one who love and obey the one Lord. The

closer we cleave to Him, the nearer we shall be to all His tribes.

We need only note in a word how these departing soldiers, leaving the

battlefield with their commander's praise and benediction, laden with

much wealth, the spoil of their enemies, and fording the stream to

reach the peaceful homes, which had long stood ready for them, may be

taken, by a permissible play of fancy, as symbols of the faithful

servants and soldiers of the true Joshua, at the end of their long

warfare passing to the kingdom prepared for them before the foundation

of the world,' bearing in their hands the wealth which, by God's grace,

they had conquered from out of things here. They are not sent away by

their Commander, but summoned by Him to the great peace of His own

presence; and while His lips give them the praise which is praise

indeed, they inscribe on the perpetual memorial which they rear no name

but His, who first wrought all their works in them, and now has

ordained eternal peace for them.

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THE NATIONAL OATH AT SHECHEM

And Joshua said unto the people. Ye cannot serve the Lord: for He is an

holy God; He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions

nor your sins. 20. If ye forsake the Lord, and serve strange gods, then

He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done

you good. 21. And the people said unto Joshua, Nay; but we will serve

the Lord. 22. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against

yourselves, that ye have chosen you the Lord, to serve Him. And they

said, We are witnesses. 23. Now therefore put away, said he, the

strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto the Lord

God of Israel. 24. And the people said unto Joshua, The Lord our God

will we serve, and His voice will we obey. 25. So Joshua made a

covenant with the people that day, and set them a statute and an

ordinance in Shechem. 26. And Joshua wrote these words in the book of

the law of God, and took a great stone, and set it up there under an

oak, that was by the sanctuary of the Lord. 27. And Joshua said unto

all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us; for it

hath heard all the words of the Lord which He spake unto us: it shall

be therefore a witness unto you, lest ye deny your God. 28. So Joshua

let the people depart, every man unto his inheritance.'--JOSHUA xxiv.

19-28.

We reach in this passage the close of an epoch. It narrates the last

public act of Joshua and the last of the assembled people before they

scatter every man unto his inheritance.' It was fitting that the

transition from the nomad stage to that of settled abode in the land

should be marked by the solemn renewal of the covenant, which is thus

declared to be the willingly accepted law for the future national life.

We have here the closing scene of that solemn assembly set before us.

The narrative carries us to Shechem, the lovely valley in the heart of

the land, already consecrated by many patriarchal associations, and by

that picturesque scene (Joshua viii. 30-35), when the gathered nation,

ranged on the slopes of Ebal and Gerizim, listened to Joshua reading

all that Moses commanded.' There, too, the coffin of Joseph, which had

been reverently carried all through the desert and the war, was laid in

the ground that Jacob had bought five hundred years ago, and which now

had fallen to Joseph's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim. There was

another reason for the selection of Shechem for this renewal of the

covenant. The gathered representatives of Israel stood, at Shechem, on

the very soil where, long ago, Abram had made his first resting-place

as a stranger in the land, and had received the first divine pledge,

unto thy seed will I give this land,' and had piled beneath the oak of

Moreh his first altar (of which the weathered stones might still be

there) to the Lord, who appeared unto him.' It was fitting that this

cradle of the nation should witness their vow, as it witnessed the

fulfilment of God's promise. What Plymouth Rock is to one side of the

Atlantic, or Hastings Field to the other, Shechem was to Israel. Vows

sworn there had sanctity added by the place. Nor did these remembrances

exhaust the appropriateness of the site. The oak, which had waved green

above Abram's altar, had looked down on another significant incident in

the life of Jacob, when, in preparation for his journey to Bethel, he

had made a clean sweep of the idols of his household, and buried them

under the oak which was by Shechem' (Gen. xxxv. 2-4). His very words

are quoted by Joshua in his command, in verse 23, and it is impossible

to overlook the intention to parallel the two events. The spot which

had seen the earlier act of purification from idolatry was for that

very reason chosen for the later. It is possible that the same tree at

whose roots the idols from beyond the river, which Leah and Rachel had

brought, had been buried, was that under which Joshua set up his

memorial stone; and it is possible that the very stone had been part of

Abram's altar. But, in any case, the place was sacred by these past

manifestations of God and devotions of the fathers, so that we need not

wonder that Joshua selected it rather than Shiloh, where the ark was,

for the scene of this national oath of obedience. Patriotism and

devotion would both burn brighter in such an atmosphere. These

considerations explain also the designation of the place as the

sanctuary of the Lord,'--a phrase which has led some to think of the

Tabernacle, and apparently occasioned the Septuagint reading of Shiloh'

instead of Shechem' in verses 1 and 25. The precise rendering of the

preposition in verse 26 (which the Revised Version has put in the

margin) shows that the Tabernacle is not meant; for how could the

oak-tree be in' the Tabernacle? Clearly, the open space, hallowed by so

many remembrances, and by the appearance to Abram, was regarded as a

sanctuary.

The earlier part of this chapter shows that the people, by their

representatives, responded with alacrity--which to Joshua seemed too

eager--to his charge, and enumerated with too facile tongues God's

deliverances and benefits. His ear must have caught some tones of

levity, if not of insincerity, in the lightly-made vow. So he meets it

with a douche of cold water in verses 19, 20, because he wishes to

condense vaporous resolutions into something more tangible and

permanent. Cold, judiciously applied, solidifies. Discouragements,

rightly put, encourage. The best way to deepen and confirm good

resolutions which have been too swiftly and inconsiderately formed, is

to state very plainly all the difficulty of keeping them. The hand that

seems to repel, often most powerfully attracts. There is no better way

of turning a somewhat careless we will' into a persistent nay, but we

will' than to interpose a ye cannot.' Many a boy has been made a sailor

by the stories of hardships which his parents have meant as

dissuasives. Joshua here is doing exactly what Jesus Christ often did.

He refused glib vows because He desired whole hearts. His very longing

that men should follow Him made Him send them back to bethink

themselves when they promised to do it. Master, I will follow Thee

whithersoever Thou goest!' was answered by no recognition of the

speaker's enthusiasm, and by no word of pleasure or invitation, but by

the apparently cold repulse: Foxes have holes, birds of the air

roosting-places; but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head. That

is what you are offering to share. Do you stand to your words?' So,

when once great multitudes' came to Him He turned on them, with no

invitation in His words, and told them the hard conditions of

discipleship as being entire self-renunciation. He will have no

soldiers enlisted under false pretences. They shall know the full

difficulties and trials which they must meet; and if, knowing these,

they still are willing to take His yoke upon them, then how exuberant

and warm the welcome which He gives!

There is a real danger that this side of the evangelist's work should

be overlooked in the earnestness with which the other side is done. We

cannot be too emphatic in our reiteration of Christ's call to all the

weary and heavy-laden' to come unto Him, nor too confident in our

assurance that whosoever comes will not be cast out'; but we may be,

and, I fear, often are, defective in our repetition of Christ's demand

for entire surrender, and of His warning to intending disciples of what

they are taking upon them. We shall repel no true seeker by duly

emphasising the difficulties of the Christian course. Perhaps, if there

were more plain speaking about these at the beginning, there would be

fewer backsliders and dead professors with a name to live.' Christ ran

the risk of the rich ruler's going away sorrowful, and so should His

messengers do. The sorrow tells of real desire, and the departure will

sooner or later be exchanged for return with a deeper and more thorough

purpose, if the earlier wish had any substance in it. If it had not,

better that the consciousness of its hollowness should be forced upon

the man, than that he should outwardly become what he is not really,--a

Christian; for, in the one case, he may be led to reflection which may

issue in thorough surrender; and in the other he will be a

self-deceived deceiver, and probably an apostate.

Note the special form of Joshua's warning. It turns mainly on two

points,--the extent of the obligations which they were so lightly

incurring, and the heavy penalties of their infraction. As to the

former, the vow to serve the Lord' had been made, as he fears, with

small consideration of what it meant. In heathenism, the service' of a

god is a mere matter of outward acts of so-called worship. There is

absolutely no connection between religion and morality in idolatrous

systems. The notion that the service of a god implies any duties in

common life beyond ceremonial ones is wholly foreign to paganism in all

its forms. The establishment of the opposite idea is wholly the

consequence of revelation. So we need not wonder if the pagan

conception of service was here in the minds of the vowing assembly. If

we look at their vow, as recorded in verses 16-18, we see nothing in it

which necessarily implies a loftier idea. Jehovah is their national

God, who has fought and conquered for them, therefore they will serve

Him.' If we substitute Baal, or Chemosh, or Nebo, or Ra, for Jehovah,

this is exactly what we read on Moabite stones and Assyrian tablets and

Egyptian tombs. The reasons for the service, and the service itself,

are both suspiciously external. We are not judging the people more

harshly than Joshua did; for he clearly was not satisfied with them,

and the tone of his answer sufficiently shows what he thought wrong in

them. Observe that he does not call Jehovah your God.' He does so

afterwards; but in this grave reply to their exuberant enthusiasm he

speaks of Him only as the Lord,' as if he would put stress on the

monotheistic conception, which, at all events, does not appear in the

people's words, and was probably dim in their thoughts. Then observe

that he broadly asserts the impossibility of their serving the Lord;

that is, of course, so long as they continued in their then tone of

feeling about Him and His service.

Then observe the points in the character of God on which he dwells, as

indicating the points which were left out of view by the people, and as

fitted to rectify their notions of service. First, He is an holy God.'

The scriptural idea of the holiness of God has a wider sweep than we

often recognise. It fundamentally means His supreme and inaccessible

elevation above the creature; which, of course, is manifested in His

perfect separation from all sin, but has not regard to this only.

Joshua here urges the infinite distance between man and God, and

especially the infinite moral distance, in order to enforce a

profounder conception of what goes to God's service. A holy God cannot

have unholy worshippers. His service can be no mere ceremonial, but

must be the bowing of the whole man before His majesty, the aspiration

of the whole man after His loftiness, the transformation of the whole

man into the reflection of His purity, the approach of the unholy to

the Holy through a sacrifice which puts away sin.

Further, He is a jealous God.' Jealous' is an ugly word, with repulsive

associations, and its application to God has sometimes been explained

in ugly fashion, and has actually repelled men. But, rightly looked at,

what does it mean but that God desires our whole hearts for His own,

and loves us so much, and is so desirous to pour His love into us, that

He will have no rivals in our love? The metaphor of marriage, which

puts His love to men in the tenderest form, underlies this word, so

harsh on the surface, but so gracious at the core.

There is still abundant need for Joshua's warning. We rejoice that it

takes so little to be a Christian that the feeblest and simplest act of

faith knits the soul to the all-forgiving Christ. But let us not forget

that, on the other hand, it is hard to be a Christian indeed; for it

means forsaking all that we have,' and loving God with all our powers.

The measure of His love is the measure of His jealousy,' and He loves

us no less than He did Israel. Unless our conceptions of His service

are based upon our recognition of His holiness and demand for our all,

we, too, cannot serve the Lord.'

The other half of Joshua's warnings refers to the penalties of the

broken vows. These are put with extraordinary force. The declaration

that the sins of the servants of God would not be forgiven is not, of

course, to be taken so as to contradict the whole teaching of

Scripture, but as meaning that the sins of His people cannot be left

unpunished. The closer relation between God and them made retribution

certain. The law of Israel's existence, which its history ever since

has exemplified, was here laid down, that their prosperity depended on

their allegiance, and that their nearness to Him ensured His

chastisement for their sin. You only have I known of all the families

of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.'

The remainder of the incident must be briefly disposed of. These

warnings produced the desired effect; for Joshua did not seek to

prevent, but to make more intelligent and firm, the people's

allegiance. The resolve, repeated after fuller knowledge, is the best

reward, as it is the earnest hope, of the faithful teacher, whose

apparent discouragements are meant to purify and deepen, not to

repress, the faintest wish to serve God. Having tested their sincerity,

he calls them to witness that their resolution is perfectly voluntary;

and, on their endorsing it as their free choice, he requires the

putting away of their strange gods,' and the surrender of their inward

selves to Him who, by this their action as well as by His benefits,

becomes in truth the God of Israel.' Attempts have been made to evade

the implication that idolatry had crept in among the people; but there

can be no doubt of the plain, sad meaning of the words. They are a

quotation of Jacob's, at the same spot, on a similar occasion centuries

before. If there were no idols buried now under the old oak, it was not

because there were none in Israel, but because they had not been

brought by the people from their homes. Joshua's commands are the

practical outcome of his previous words. If God be holy' and jealous,'

serving Him must demand the forsaking of all other gods, and the

surrender of heart and self to Him. That is as true to-day as ever it

was. The people accept the stringent requirement, and their repeated

shout of obedience has a deeper tone than their first hasty utterance

had. They have learned what service means,--that it includes more than

ceremonies; and they are willing to obey His voice. Blessed those for

whom the plain disclosure of all that they must give up to follow Him,

only leads to the more assured and hearty response of willing

surrender!

The simple but impressive ceremony which ratified the covenant thus

renewed consisted of two parts,--the writing of the account of the

transaction in the book of the law'; and the erection of a great stone,

whose grey strength stood beneath the green oak, a silent witness that

Israel, by his own choice, after full knowledge of all that the vow

meant, had reiterated his vow to be the Lord's. Thus on the spot made

sacred by so many ancient memories, the people ended their wandering

and homeless life, and passed into the possession of the inheritance,

through the portal of this fresh acceptance of the covenant,

proclaiming thereby that they held the land on condition of serving

God, and writing their own sentence in case of unfaithfulness. It was

the last act of the assembled people, and the crown and close of

Joshua's career.

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THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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A SUMMARY OF ISRAEL'S FAITHLESSNESS AND GOD'S PATIENCE

And an angel of the Lord came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said, I

made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land

which I sware unto your fathers; and I said, I will never break my

covenant with you. 2. And ye shall make no league with the inhabitants

of this land; ye shall throw down their altars: but ye have not obeyed

my voice: why have ye done this? 3. Wherefore I also said, I will not

drive them out from before you; but they shall be as thorns in your

sides, and their gods shall be a snare unto you. 4. And it came to

pass, when the angel of the Lord spake these words unto all the

children of Israel, that the people lifted up their voice, and wept. 5.

And they called the name of that place Bochim: and they sacrificed

there unto the Lord. 6. And when Joshua had let the people go, the

children of Israel went every man unto his inheritance to possess the

land. 7. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all

the days of the elders that outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great

works of the Lord that He did for Israel. 8. And Joshua the son of Nun,

the servant of the Lord, died, being an hundred and ten years old. 9.

And they buried him in the border of his inheritance in Timnath-heres,

in the mount of Ephraim, on the north side of the hill Gaash. 10. And

also all that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there

arose another generation after them, which knew not the Lord, nor yet

the works which He had done for Israel.'--JUDGES ii. 1-10.

The Book of Judges begins a new era, the development of the nation in

its land. Chapters i. to iii. 6 contain two summaries: first, of the

progress of the conquest; and second, of the history about to be

unfolded in the book. The first part of this passage (verses 1-5)

belongs to the former, and closes it; the second (verses 6-10)

introduces the latter, and contrasts it with the state of things

prevailing as long as the soldiers of Joshua lived.

I. The Angel of the Lord' had appeared to Joshua in Gilgal at the

beginning of the war, and issued his orders as Captain of the Lord's

host.' Now He reappears to ask why his orders had not been carried out,

and to announce that victory was no longer to attend Israel's arms.

Nothing can be plainer than that the Angel speaks as one in whom the

divine name dwells. His reiterated I's' are incomprehensible on any

other hypothesis than that He is that mysterious person, distinct from

and yet one with Jehovah, whom we know as the Word made flesh.' His

words here are stern. He enumerates the favours which He had showed to

Israel, and which should have inspired them to glad obedience. He

recalls the conditions on which they had received the land; namely,

that they were to enter into no entangling alliances with the remnant

of the inhabitants, and especially to have no tolerance for their

idolatry. Here we may observe that, according to Joshua's last charge,

the extermination of the native peoples was not contemplated, but that

there should be no such alliances as would peril Israel's observance of

the covenant (Joshua xxiii. 7, 12). He charges them with disobedience,

and asks the same question as had been asked of Eve, What is this ye

have done?' And He declares the punishment about to follow, in the

paralysing of Israel's conquering arm by the withdrawal of His

conquering might, and in the seductions from the native inhabitants to

which they would fall victims.

Note, then, how God's benefits aggravate our disobedience, and how He

bases His right to command on them. Further, note how His promises are

contingent on our fulfilment of their conditions, and how a covenant

which He has sworn that He will never break He does count as

non-existent when men break it. Again, observe the sharp arraignment of

the faithless, and the forcing of them to bethink themselves of the

true character of their deeds, or, if we adopt the Revised Version's

rendering, of the unreasonableness of departing from God. No man dare

answer when God asks, What hast thou done?' No man can answer

reasonably when He asks, Why hast thou done it?' Once more, note that

His servants sin when they allow themselves to be so mixed up with the

world that they are in peril of learning its ways and getting a snare

to their souls. We have all unconquered Canaanites' in our hearts, and

amity with them is supreme folly and crying wickedness. Thorough' must

be our motto. Many times have the conquered overcome their conquerors,

as in Rome's conquest of Greece, the Goths' conquest of Rome, the

Normans' conquest of England. Israel was in some respects conquered by

Canaanites and other conquered tribes. Let us take care that we are not

overcome by our inward foes, whom we fancy we have subdued and can

afford to treat leniently.

Again, God punishes our making truce with our spiritual foes by letting

the effects of the truce work themselves out. He said to Israel, in

effect: If you make alliances with the people of the land, you shall no

longer have power to cast them out. The swift rush of the stream of

victory shall be stayed. You have chosen to make them your friends, and

their friendship shall produce its natural effects, of tempting you to

imitation.' The increased power of our unsubdued evils is the

punishment, as it is the result, of tolerance of them. We wanted to

keep them, and dreamed that we could control them. Keep them we shall,

control them we cannot. They will master us if we do not expel them. No

wonder that the place was named Bochim (Weepers'), when such stern

words were thundered forth. Tears flow easily; and many a sin is wept

for once, and afterwards repeated often. So it was with Israel, as the

narrative goes on to tell. Let us take the warning, and give heed to

make repentance deep and lasting.

II. Verses 6-10 go back to an earlier period than the appearance of the

Angel. We do not know how long the survivors of the conquering army

lived in sufficient numbers to leaven opinion and practice. We may,

however, roughly calculate that the youngest of these would be about

twenty when the war began, and that about fifty years would see the end

of the host that had crossed Jordan and stormed Jericho. If Joshua was

of about the same age as Caleb, he would be about eighty at the

beginning of the conquest, and lived thirty years afterwards, so that

about twenty years after his death would be the limit of the elders

that outlived Joshua.'

Verses 6-9 substantially repeat Joshua xxiv. 28-31, and are here

inserted to mark not only the connection with the former book, but to

indicate the beginning of a new epoch. The facts narrated in this

paragraph are but too sadly in accord with the uniform tendencies of

our poor weak nature. As long as some strong personality leads a nation

or a church, it keeps true to its early fervour. The first generation

which has lived through some great epoch, when God's arm has been made

bare, retains the impression of His power. But when the leader falls,

it is like withdrawing a magnet, and the heap of iron filings tumbles

back to the ground inert. Think of the post-Apostolic age of the

Church, of Germany in the generation after Luther, not to come nearer

home, and we must see that Israel's experience was an all but universal

one. It is hard to keep a community even of professing Christians on

the high level. No great cause is ever launched which does not lose

way' as it continues. Having begun in the Spirit,' all such are too apt

to continue in the flesh.' The original impulses wane, friction begins

to tell. Custom clogs the wheels. The fiery lava-stream cools and

slackens. So it always has been. Therefore God has to change His

instruments, and churches need to be shaken up, and sometimes broken

up, lest one good,' when it has degenerated into custom,' should

corrupt the world.'

But we shall miss the lesson here taught if we do not apply it to

tendencies in ourselves, and humbly recognise that we are in danger of

being hindered,' however well' we may have begun to run,' and that our

only remedy is to renew continually our first-hand vision of the great

works of the Lord,' and our consecration to His service. It is a poor

affair if, like Israel, our devotion to God depends on Joshua's life,

or, like King Joash, we do that which is right in the eyes of the Lord

all the days of Jehoiada the priest.'

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ISRAEL'S OBSTINACY AND GOD'S PATIENCE

And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and

served Baalim; 12. And they forsook the Lord God of their fathers,

which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods,

of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed

themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. 13. And they

forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth. 14. And the anger of

the Lord was hot against Israel, and He delivered them into the hands

of spoilers that spoiled them, and He sold them into the hands of their

enemies round about, so that they could not any longer stand before

their enemies. 15. Whithersoever they went out, the hand of the Lord

was against them for evil, as the Lord had said, and as the Lord had

sworn unto them: and they were greatly distressed. 16. Nevertheless the

Lord raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those

that spoiled them. 17. And yet they would not hearken unto their

judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves

unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers

walked in, obeying the commandments of the Lord; but they did not so.

18. And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the

judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days

of the judge: for it repented the Lord because of their groanings, by

reason of them that oppressed them, and vexed them. 19. And it came to

pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted

themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve

them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings,

nor from their stubborn way. 20. And the anger of the Lord was hot

against Israel; and He said, Because that this people hath transgressed

My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened

unto My voice; 21. I also will not henceforth drive out any from before

them of the nations which Joshua left when he died: 22. That through

them I may prove Israel, whether they will keep the way of the Lord, to

walk therein, as their fathers did keep it, or not. 23. Therefore the

Lord left those nations, without driving them out hastily; neither

delivered He them into the hand of Joshua.'--JUDGES ii. 11-23.

This passage sums up the Book of Judges, and also the history of Israel

for over four hundred years. Like the overture of an oratorio, it

sounds the main themes of the story which follows. That story has four

chapters, repeated with dreary monotony over and over again. They are:

Relapse into idolatry, retribution, respite and deliverance, and brief

return to God. The last of these phases soon passes into fresh relapse,

and then the old round is gone all over again, as regularly as the

white and red lights and the darkness reappear in a revolving

lighthouse lantern, or the figures recur in a circulating decimal

fraction. That sad phrase which begins this lesson, The children of

Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord,' is repeated at the beginning

of each new record of apostacy, on which duly follow, as outlined here,

the oppression by the enemy, the raising up of a deliverer, the gleam

of brightness which dies with him, and then, da capo, the children of

Israel did evil,' and all the rest as before. The names change, but the

incidents are the same. There is something extremely impressive in this

uniformity of the plan of the book, which thus sets in so strong light

the persistence through generations of the same bad strain in the

nation's blood, and the unwearying patience of God. The story of these

successive recurrences of the same sequence of events occupies the book

to the end of chapter xvi., and the remainder of it is taken up with

two wild stories deeply stained with the lawlessness and moral laxity

of these anarchic times. We may best bring out the force of this

summary by considering in their order the four stages signalised.

I. The first is the continual tendency to relapse into idolatry. The

fact itself, and the frank prominence given to it in the Old Testament,

are both remarkable. As to the latter, certainly, if the Old Testament

histories have the same origin as the chronicles of other nations, they

present most anomalous features. Where do we find any other people

whose annals contain nothing that can minister to national vanity, and

have for one of their chief themes the sins of the nation? The history

of Israel, as told in Scripture, is one long indictment of Israel. The

peculiarity is explicable, if we believe that, whoever or how numerous

soever its authors, God was its true Author, as He is its true theme,

and that the object of its histories is not to tell the deeds of

Israel, but those of God for Israel.

As to the fact of the continual relapses into idolatry, nothing could

be more natural than that the recently received and but imperfectly

assimilated revelation of the one God, with its stringent requirements

of purity, and its severe prohibition of idols, should easily slip off

from these rude and merely outward worshippers. Joshua's death without

a successor, the dispersion of the tribes, the difficulty of

communication when much of the country was still in the hands of its

former possessors, would all weaken the sense of unity, which was too

recent to be firm, and would expose the isolated Israelites to the full

force of the temptation to idolatry. It is difficult for us fairly to

judge the immense strain required for resistance to it. The conception

of one sole God was too high to be easily retained. A shrine without a

deity seemed bare and empty. The Law stringently bridled passions which

the hideous worship of the Canaanites stimulated. No wonder that, when

the first generation of the conquerors had passed away, their

successors lapsed into the universal polytheism, with its attendant

idolatry and immorality. Instead of thinking of the Israelites as

monsters of ingratitude and backsliding, we come nearer the truth, and

make a better use of the history, when we see in it a mirror which

shows us our own image. The strong earthward pull is ever acting on us,

and, unless God hold us up, we too shall slide downwards. Hath a nation

changed their gods, which yet are no gods? but My people hath changed

their glory for that which doth not profit.' Idolatry and worldliness

are persistent; for they are natural. Firm adherence to God is less

common, because it goes against the strong forces, within and without,

which bind us to earth.

Apparently the relapses into idolatry did not imply the entire

abandonment of the worship of Jehovah, but the worship of Baalim and

Ashtaroth along with it. Such illegitimate mixing up of deities was

accordant with the very essence of polytheism, and repugnant to that of

the true worship of God. The one may be tolerant, the other cannot be.

To unite Baal with Jehovah was to forsake Jehovah.

These continual relapses have an important bearing on the question of

the origin of the Jewish conception of God.' They are intelligible only

if we take the old-fashioned explanation, that its origin was a divine

revelation, given to a rude people. They are unintelligible if we take

the new-fashioned explanation that the monotheism of Israel was the

product of natural evolution, or was anything but a treasure put by God

into their hands, which they did not appreciate, and would willingly

have thrown away. The foul Canaanitish worship was the kind of thing in

which, if left to themselves, they would have wallowed. How came such

people by such thoughts as these? The history of Israel's idolatry is

not the least conclusive proof of the supernatural revelation which

made Israel's religion.

II. Note the swift-following retribution. We have two sections in the

context dealing with this, each introduced by that terrible phrase,

which recurs so often in the subsequent parts of the book, The anger of

the Lord was kindled against Israel.' That phrase is no sign of a lower

conception of God than that which the gospel brings. Wrath is an

integral part of love, when the lover is perfectly righteous and the

loved are sinful. The most terrible anger is the anger of perfect

gentleness, as expressed in that solemn paradox of the Apostle of love,

when he speaks of the wrath of the Lamb.' God was angry with Israel

because He loved them, and desired their love for their own good. The

fact of His choice of the nation for His own and the intensity of His

love were shown no less by the swift certainty with which suffering

dogged sin, than by the blessings which crowned obedience. The first

section, referring to the punishment, is in verses 14 and 15, which

seems to describe mainly the defeats and plunderings which outside

surrounding nations inflicted. The brief description is extraordinarily

energetic. It ascribes all their miseries to God's direct act. He

delivered' them over, or, as the next clause says still more strongly,

sold' them, to plunderers, who stripped them bare. Their defeats were

the result of His having thus ceased to regard them as His. But though

He had sold' them, He had not done with them; for it was not only the

foeman's hand that struck them, but God's hand was against them,' and

its grip crushed them. His judgments were not occasional, but

continuous, and went with them whithersoever they went out.' Everything

went wrong with them; there were no gleams breaking the black

thunder-cloud. God's anger darkened the whole sky, and blasted the

whole earth. And the misery was the more miserable and awful because it

had all been foretold, and in it God was but doing as He had said' and

sworn. It is a dreadful picture of the all-withering effect of God's

anger,--a picture which is repeated in inmost verity in many an

outwardly prosperous life to-day.

The second section is in verses 20-23, and describes the consequence of

Israel's relapse in reference to the surviving Canaanite and other

tribes in the land itself. Note that nation' in verse 20 is the term

usually applied, not to Israel, but to the Gentile peoples; and that

its use here seems equivalent to cancelling the choice of Israel as

God's special possession, and reducing them to the level of the other

nations in Canaan, to whom the same term is applied in verse 21. The

stern words which are here put into the mouth of God may possibly refer

to the actual message recorded in the first verses of the chapter; but,

more probably, the Lord said' does not here mean any divine

communication, but only the divine resolve, conceived as spoken to

himself. It embodies the divine lex talionis. The punishment is

analogous to the crime. Israel had broken the covenant; God would not

keep His promise. That involves a great principle as to all God's

promises,--that they are all conditional, and voidable by men's failure

to fulfil their conditions. Observe, too, that the punishment is the

retention of the occasions of the sin. Is not that, too, a law of the

divine procedure to-day? Whips to scourge us are made of our pleasant

vices. Sin is the punishment of sin. If we yield to some temptation,

part of the avenging retribution is that the temptation abides by us,

and has power over us. The Canaanites' whom we have allowed to lead us

astray will stay beside us when their power to seduce us is done, and

will pull off their masks and show themselves for what they are, our

spoilers and foes.

The rate of Israel's conquest was determined by Israel's faithful

adherence to God. That is a standing law. Victory for us in all the

good fight of life depends on our cleaving to Him, and forsaking all

other.

The divine motive, if we may so say, in leaving the unsubdued nations

in the land, was to provide the means of proving Israel. Would it not

have been better, since Israel was so weak, to secure for it an

untempted period? Surely, it is a strange way of helping a man who has

stumbled, to make provision that future occasions of stumbling shall

lie in his path. But so the perfect wisdom which is perfect love ever

ordains. There shall be no unnatural greenhouse shelter provided for

weak plants. The liability to fall imposes the necessity of trial, but

the trial does not impose the necessity of falling! The Devil tempts,

because he hopes that we shall fall. God tries, in order that we may

stand, and that our feet may be strengthened by the trial. I cannot

praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed,

that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the

race, where that immortal garland is to be run for,--not without dust

and heat.'

III. Respite and deliverance are described in verses 16 and 18. The

Revised Version has wisely substituted a simple and' for nevertheless'

at the beginning of verse 16. The latter word implies that the raising

up of the judges was a reversal of what had gone before; and' implies

that it was a continuation. And its use here is not merely an instance

of inartificial Hebrew style, but carries the lesson that God's

judgment and deliverance come from the same source, and are harmonious

parts of one educational process. Nor is this thought negatived by the

statement in verse 18 that it repented the Lord.' That strong

metaphorical ascription to Him of human emotion simply implies that His

action, which of necessity is the expression of His will, was changed.

The will of the moment before had been to punish; the will of the next

moment was to deliver, because their groaning' showed that the

punishment had done its work. But the two wills were one in ultimate

purpose, and the two sets of acts were equally and harmoniously parts

of one design. The surgeon is carrying out one plan when he cuts deep

into the quivering flesh, and when he sews up the wounds which he

himself has made. God's deliverances are linked to His chastisements by

and,' not by nevertheless.' We need not discuss that remarkable series

of judges, who were champions rather than the peaceful functionaries

whom we understand by the name. The vivid and stirring stories

associated with their names make the bulk of this book, and move the

most peace-loving among us like the sound of a trumpet. These wild

warriors, with many a roughness and flaw in their characters, of whom

no saintly traits are recorded, are yet treated in this section as

directly inspired, and as continually upheld by God. The writer of the

Epistle to the Hebrews claims some of them as heroes of faith.' And one

chief lesson for us to learn, as we look on the strange garb in which

in them faith has arrayed itself, and the strange work which it does in

nerving hands to strike with sharp swords, is the oneness of the

principle amid the most diverse manifestations, and the nobleness and

strength which the sense of belonging to God and reliance on His help

breathe into the rudest life and shed over the wildest scenes.

These judges were raised up indiscriminately from different tribes.

They belonged to different ranks, and were of different occupations.

One of them was a woman. The when and the where and the how of their

appearance were incalculable. They authenticated their commission by no

miracles except victory. For a time they started to the front, and then

passed, leaving no successors, and founding no dynasty. They were an

entirely unique order, plainly raised up by God, and drawing all their

power from Him. Let us be thankful for the weaknesses, and even sins,

recorded of some of them, and for the boldness with which the book

traces the physical strength of a Samson, in spite of his wild

animalism, and the bravery of a Jephthah, notwithstanding his savage

vow and subsequent lapse into idolatry, to God's inspiration. Their

faith was limited, and acted but imperfectly on their moral nature; but

it was true faith, in the judgment of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Their

work was rough and bloody, and they were rough tools, as such work

needed; but it was God's work, and He had made them for His

instruments, in the judgment of the Book of Judges. If we try to

understand the reasons for such judgments, we may learn some useful

lessons.

IV. A word only can be given to the last stage in the dreary round. It

comes back to the first. The religion of the delivered people lasted as

long as the judge's life. When he died, it died. There is intense

bitterness in the remark to that effect in verse 19. Did God then die

with the judge? Was it Samson, or Jehovah, that had delivered? Why

should the death of the instrument affect gratitude to the hand that

gave it its edge? What a lurid light is thrown back on the unreality of

the people's return to God by their swift relapse! If it needed a human

hand to keep them from departing, had they ever come near? We may press

the questions on ourselves; for none of us knows how much of our

religion is owing to the influence of men upon us, or how much of it

would drop away if we were left to ourselves.

This miserable repetition of the same weary round of sin, punishment,

respite, and renewed sin, sets in a strong light the two great wonders

of man's obstinate persistency in unfaithfulness and sin, and of God's

unwearied persistency in discipline and patient forgiveness. His

charity suffers long and is kind, is not easily provoked.' We can weary

out all forbearance but His, which is endless. We weary Him indeed, but

we do not weary Him out, with our iniquities. Man's sin stretches far;

but God's patient love overlaps it. It lasts long; but God's love is

eternal. It resists miracles of chastisement and love; but He does not

cease His use of the rod and the staff. We can tire out all other

forbearance, but not His. And however old and obstinate our rebellion,

He waits to pardon, and smites but to heal.

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RECREANT REUBEN

Why satest then among the sheepfolds, to hear the pipings for the

flocks? At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of

heart.'--JUDGES v. 16 (R.V.).

I. The fight.

The warfare is ever repeated, though in new forms. In the highest form

it is Christ versus the World, And that conflict must be fought out in

our own souls first. Our religion should lead not only to accept and

rely on what Christ does for us, but to do and dare for Christ. He has

given Himself for us, and has thereby won the right to recruit us as

His soldiers. We have to fight against ourselves to establish His reign

over ourselves.

And then we have to give our personal service in the great battle for

right and truth, for establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. There

come national crises when every man must take up arms, but in Christ's

kingdom that is a permanent obligation. There the nation is the army.

Each subject is not only His servant but His soldier. The metaphor is

well worn, but it carries everlasting truth, and to take it seriously

to heart would revolutionise our lives.

II. The reason for standing aloof. Reuben abode in the sheepfolds to

hear the pipings to the flocks.' For Dan his ships, for Asher his

havens held them apart. Reuben and the other trans-Jordanic tribes held

loosely by the national unity. They had fallen in love with an easy

life of pastoral wealth, they did not care to venture anything for the

national good. It is still too true that like reasons are largely

operative in producing like results. It is seldom from the wealthy and

leisurely classes that the bold fighters for great social reformations

are recruited. Times of commercial prosperity are usually times of

stagnation in regard to these. Reuben lies lazily listening to the

drowsy tinklings' that lull' not only the distant folds' but himself to

inglorious slumber, while Zebulon and Naphtali are venturing their

lives on the high places of the field.' The love of ease enervates many

a one who should be doing valiantly for the Captain of his salvation.'

The men of Reuben cared more for their sheep than for their nation.

They were not minded to hazard these by listening to Deborah's call.

And what their flocks were to that pastoral tribe, their business is to

shoals of professing Christians. The love of the world depletes the

ranks of Christ's army, and they are comparatively few who stick by the

colours and are ready, aye ready' for service, as the brave motto of

one English regiment has it. The lives of multitudes of so-called

Christians are divided between strained energy in their business or

trade or profession and self-regarding repose. No doubt competition is

fierce, and, no doubt, a Christian man is bound, whatsoever his hand

finds to do, to do it with his might,' and, no doubt, rest is as much a

duty as work. But must not loyalty to Jesus have become tepid, if a

servant of His has so little interest in the purposes for which He gave

His life that he can hear no call to take active part in promoting

them, nor find rest in the work by which he becomes a fellow-worker

with his Lord?

III. The recreant's brave resolves which came to nothing. The indignant

question of our text is, as it were, framed between two clauses which

contrast Reuben's indolent holding aloof with his valorous resolves. By

the watercourses of Reuben there were great resolves of heart.' . . .

At the watercourses of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.'

Resolves came first, but they were not immediately acted on, and as the

Reubenites sate among the sheepfolds and felt the charm of their

peaceful lives, the native hue of resolution was sicklied o'er,' and

doubts of the wisdom of their gallant determination crept in, and their

valour oozed out. And so for all their fine resolves, they had no share

in the fight nor in the triumph.

So let us lay the warning of that example to heart, and if we are

stirred by noble impulses to take our place in the ranks of the

fighters for God, let us act on these at once. Emotions evaporate very

soon if they are not used to drive the wheels of conduct. The Psalmist

was wise who delayed not, but made haste and delayed not to keep God's

commandments.' Many a man has over and over again resolved to serve God

in some specific fashion, and to enlist in the effective force' of

Christ's army, and has died without ever having done it.

IV. The question in the hour of victory. Why?'

Deborah asks it with vehement contempt.

That victory is certain. Are you to have part in it?

The question will be asked on the judgment day by Christ, and by our

own consciences. And he was speechless.'

To be neutral is to be on the side of the enemy, against whom the stars

fight,' and whom Kishon sweeps away.

Who is on the Lord's side?'--Who?

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ALL THINGS ARE YOURS'

They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against

Sisera.'--JUDGES v. 20.

For thou shalt be in league with the stones of the field: and the

beasts of the field shall be at peace with thee.'--JOB v. 23.

These two poetical fragments present the same truth on opposite sides.

The first of them comes from Deborah's triumphant chant. The singer

identifies God with the cause of Israel, and declares that heaven

itself fought against those who fought against God's people. There may

be an allusion to the tempest which Jewish tradition tells us burst

over the ranks of the enemy, or there may be some trace of ancient

astrological notions, or the words may simply be an elevated way of

saying that Heaven fought for Israel. The silent stars, as they swept

on their paths through the sky, advanced like an avenging host

embattled against the foes of Israel and of God. All things fight

against the man who fights against God.

The other text gives the other side of the same truth. One of Job's

friends is rubbing salt into his wounds by insisting on the

commonplace, which needs a great many explanations and limitations

before it can be accepted as true, that sin is the cause of sorrow, and

that righteousness brings happiness; and in the course of trying to

establish this heartless thesis to a heavy heart he breaks into a

strain of the loftiest poetry in describing the blessedness of the

righteous. All things, animate and inanimate, are upon his side. The

ground, which Genesis tells us is cursed for his sake,' becomes his

ally, and the very creatures whom man's sin set at enmity against him

are at peace with him. All things are the friends and servants of him

who is the friend and servant of God.

I. So, putting these two texts together, we have first the great

conviction to which religion clings, that God being on our side all

things are for us, and not against us.

Now, that is the standing faith of the Old Testament, which no doubt

was more easily held in those days, because, if we accept its teaching,

we shall recognise that Israel lived under a system in so far

supernatural as that moral goodness and material prosperity were a

great deal more closely and indissolubly connected than they are

to-day. So, many a psalmist and many a prophet breaks out into

apostrophes, warranted by the whole history of Israel, and declaring

how blessed are the men who, apart from all other defences and sources

of prosperity, have God for their help and Him for their hope.

But we are not to dismiss this conviction as belonging only to a system

where the supernatural comes in, as it does in the Old Testament

history, and as antiquated under a dispensation such as that in which

we live. For the New Testament is not a whit behind the Old in

insisting upon this truth. All things work together for good to them

that love God.' All things are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ

is God's.' Who is he that will harm you if ye be followers of that

which is good?' The New Testament is committed to the same conviction

as that to which the faith of Old Testament saints clung as the sheet

anchor of their lives.

That conviction cannot be struck out of the creed of any man, who

believes in the God to whom the Old and the New Testament alike bear

witness. For it rests upon this plain principle, that all this great

universe is not a chaos, but a cosmos, that all these forces and

creatures are not a rabble, but an ordered host.

What is the meaning of that great Name by which, from of old, God in

His relations to the whole universe has been described--the Lord of

Hosts'? Who are the hosts' of which He is the Lord,' and to whom, as

the centurion said, He says to this one, Go!' and he goeth; and to

another, Come!' and he cometh; and to another, Do this!' and he doeth

it? Who are the hosts'? Not only these beings who are dimly revealed to

us as rational and intelligent, who excel in strength,' because they

hearken to the voice of His word', but in the ranks of that great army

are also embattled all the forces of the universe, and all things

living or dead. All are Thy servants; they continue this day'--angels,

stars, creatures of earth-- according to Thine ordinances.'

And if it be true that the All is an ordered whole, which is obedient

to the touch and to the will of that divine Commander, then all His

servants must be on the same side, and cannot turn their arms against

each other. As an old hymn says with another reference--

All the servants of our King

In heaven and earth are one,'

and none of them can injure, wound, or slay a fellow-servant. If all

are travelling in the same direction there can be no collision. If all

are enlisted under the same standard they can never turn their weapons

against each other. If God sways all things, then all things which God

sways must be on the side of the men that are on the side of God. Thou

shalt make a league with the stones of the field: and the beasts of the

field shall be at peace with thee.'

II, Note the difficulties arising from experience, in the way of

holding fast by this conviction of faith.

The grim facts of the world, seen from their lowest level, seem to

shatter it to atoms. Talk about the stars in their courses fighting'

for or against anybody! In one aspect it is superstition, in another

aspect it is a dream and an illusion. The prose truth is that they

shine down silent, pitiless, cold, indifferent, on battlefields or on

peaceful homes; and the moonlight is as pure when it falls upon broken

hearts as when it falls upon glad ones. Nature is utterly indifferent

to the moral or the religious character of its victims. It goes on its

way unswerving and pitiless; and whether the man who stands in its path

is good or bad matters not. If he gets into a typhoon he will be

wrecked; if he tumbles over Niagara he will be drowned. And what

becomes of all the talk about an embattled universe on the side of

goodness, in the face of the plain facts of life--of nature's

indifference, nature's cruelty which has led some men to believe in two

sovereign powers, one beneficent and one malicious, and has led others

to say, God is a superfluous hypothesis, and to believe in Him brings

more enigmas than it solves,' and has led still others to say, Why, if

there is a God, does it look as if either He was not all-powerful, or

was not all-merciful?' Nature has but ambiguous evidence to give in

support of this conviction.

Then, if we turn to what we call Providence and its mysteries, the very

book of Job, from which my second text is taken, is one of the earliest

attempts to grapple with the difficulty and to untie the knot; and I

suppose everybody will admit that, whatever may be the solution which

is suggested by that enigmatical book, the solution is by no means a

complete one, though it is as complete as the state of religious

knowledge at the time at which the book was written made possible to be

attained. The seventy-third psalm shows that even in that old time

when, as I have said, supernatural sanctions were introduced into the

ordinary dealings of life, the difficulties that cropped up were great

enough to bring a devout heart to a stand, and to make the Psalmist

say, My feet were almost gone; my steps had well-nigh slipped.'

Providence, with all its depths and mysteries, often to our aching

hearts seems in our own lives to contradict the conviction, and when we

look out over the sadness of humanity, still more does it seem

impossible for us to hold fast by the faith that all which we behold is

full of blessings.'

I doubt not that there are many of ourselves whose lives, shadowed,

darkened, hemmed in, perplexed, or made solitary for ever, seem to them

to be hard to reconcile with this cheerful faith upon which I am trying

to insist. Brethren, cling to it even in the darkness. Be sure of this,

that amongst all our mercies there are none more truly merciful than

those which come to us shrouded in dark garments, and in questionable

shapes. Let nothing rob us of the confidence that all things work

together for good.'

III. I come, lastly, to consider the higher form in which this

conviction is true for ever.

I have said that the facts of life seem often to us, and are felt often

by some of us, to shatter it to atoms; to riddle it through and through

with shot. But, if we bring the Pattern-life to bear upon the

illumination of all life, and if we learn the lessons of the Cradle and

the Cross, and rise to the view of human life which emerges from the

example of Jesus Christ, then we get back the old conviction,

transfigured indeed, but firmer than ever. We have to alter the point

of view. Everything always depends on the point of view. We have to

alter one or two definitions. Definitions come first in geometry and in

everything else. Get them right, and you will get your theorems and

problems right.

So, looking at life in the light of Christ, we have to give new

contents to the two words good' and evil,' and a new meaning to the two

words for' and against.' And when we do that, then the difficulties

straighten themselves out, and there are not any more knots, but all is

plain; and the old faith of the Old Testament, which reposed very

largely upon abnormal and extraordinary conditions of life, comes back

in a still nobler form, as possible to be held by us amidst the

commonplace of our daily existence.

For everything is my friend, is for me and not against me, that helps

me nearer to God. To live for Him, to live with Him, to be conscious

ever of communion with Himself, to feel the touch of His hand on my

hand, and the pressure of His breast against mine, at all moments of my

life, is my true and the highest good. And if it is true that the river

of the water of life' which flows from the Throne of God' is the only

draught that can ever satisfy the immortal thirst of a soul, then

whatever drives me away from the cisterns and to the fountain, is on my

side. Better to dwell in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is,' if

it makes me long for the water that rises at the gate of the true

Bethlehem--the house of bread--than to dwell in a land flowing with

milk and honey, and well watered in every part! If the cup that I would

fain lift to my lips has poison in it, or if its sweetness is making me

lose my relish for the pure and tasteless river that flows from the

Throne of God, there can be no truer friend than that calamity, as men

call it, which strikes the cup from my hands, and shivers the glass

before I have raised it to my lips. Everything is my friend that helps

me towards God.

Everything is my friend that leads me to submission and obedience. The

joy of life, and the perfection of human nature, is an absolutely

submitted will, identified with the divine, both in regard to doing and

to enduring. And whatever tends to make my will flexible, so that it

corresponds to all the sinuosities, so to speak, of the divine will,

and fits into all its bends and turns, is a blessing to me. Raw hides,

stiff with dirt and blood, are put into a bath of bitter infusion of

oak-bark. What for? For the same end as, when they are taken out, they

are scraped with sharp steels,--that they may become flexible. When

that is done the useless hide is worth something.

Our wills are ours, we know not how;

Our wills are ours, to make them Thine.'

And whatever helps me to that is my friend.

Everything is a friend to the man that loves God, in a far sweeter and

deeper sense than it can ever be to any other. Like a sudden burst of

sunshine upon a gloomy landscape, the light of union with God and

friendship with Him flooding my daily life flashes it all up into

brightness. The dark ribbon of the river that went creeping through the

black copses, when the sun glints upon it, gleams up into links of

silver, and the trees by its bank blaze out into green and gold.

Brethren! Who follows pleasure follows pain'; who follows God finds

pleasure following him. There can be no surer way to set the world

against me than to try to make it for me, and to make it my all They

tell us that if you want to count those stars that like a swarm of

fire-flies tangled in a silver braid' make up the Pleiades, the surest

way to see the greatest number of them is to look a little on one side

of them. Look away from the joys and friendships of creatural things

right up to God, and you will see these sparkling and dancing in the

skies, as you never see them when you gaze at them only. Make them

second and they are good and on your side. Make them first, and they

will turn to be your enemies and fight against you.

This conviction will be established still more irrefragably and

wonderfully in that future. Nothing lasts but goodness. He that doeth

the will of God abideth for ever.' To oppose it is like stretching a

piece of pack-thread across the rails before the express comes; or

putting up some thin wooden partition on the beach on one of the

Western Hebrides, exposed to the whole roll of the Atlantic, which will

be battered into ruin by the first winter's storm. Such is the end of

all those who set themselves against God.

But there comes a future in which, as dim hints tell us, these texts of

ours shall receive a fulfilment beyond that realised in the present

condition of things. Then comes the statelier Eden back to man,' and in

a renewed and redeemed earth they shall not hurt nor destroy in all My

holy mountain'; and the ancient story will be repeated in higher form.

The servants shall be like the Lord who, when He had conquered

temptation, was with the wild beasts' that forgot their enmity, and

angels ministered unto Him.' That scene in the desert may serve as a

prophecy of the future when, under conditions of which we know nothing,

all God's servants shall, even more markedly and manifestly than here,

help each other; and every man that loves God will find a friend in

every creature.

If we take Him for our Commander, and enlist ourselves in that

embattled host, then all weathers will be good; stormy winds,

fulfilling His word,' will blow us to our port; the wilderness will

rejoice and blossom as the rose'; and the whole universe will be

radiant with the light of His presence, and ringing with the music of

His voice. But if we elect to join the other army--for there is another

army, and men have wills that enable them to lift themselves up against

God, the Ruler of all things--then the old story, from which my first

text is taken, will fulfil itself again in regard to us--the stars in

their courses will fight against' us; and Sisera, lying stiff and

stark, with Jael's tent-peg through his temples, and the swollen

corpses being swirled down to the stormy sea by that ancient river, the

river Kishon,' will be a grim parable of the end of the men that set

themselves against God, and so have the universe against them. Choose

ye this day whom ye will serve.'

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LOVE MAKES SUNS

Let them that love Him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his

might.'--JUDGES v. 51.

These are the closing words of Deborah, the great warrior-prophetess of

Israel. They are in singular contrast with the tone of fierce

enthusiasm for battle which throbs through the rest of the chant, and

with its stern approval of the deed of Jael when she slew Sisera. Here,

in its last notes, we have an anticipation of the highest and best

truths of the Gospel. Let them that love Him be as the sun when he

goeth forth in His might.' If we think of the singer, of the age and

the occasion of the song, such purely spiritual, lofty words must seem

very remarkable.

I. Note, then, first of all, how here we have a penetrating insight

into the essence of religion.

This woman had been nourished upon a more or less perfect edition of

what we know as the Mosaic Law.' Her faith had been fed by forms. She

moved amidst a world full of the cruelties and dark conceptions of a

mysterious divine power which torture heathenism apart from

Christianity. She had forced her way through all that, and laid hold of

the vital centre. And there, a way out amidst cruelty and murder,

amidst the unutterable abominations and terrors of heathenism, in the

centre of a rigid system of ceremonial and retaliation, the woman's

heart spoke out, and taught her what was the great commandment.

Prophetess she was, fighter she was, she could burst into triumphant

approval of Jael's bloody deed; and yet with the same lips could speak

this profound word. She had learned that Thou shalt love the Lord thy

God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy

strength, and with all thy mind,' summed up all duty, and was the

beginning of all good in man. That precept found an echo in her heart.

Whatever part in her religious development may have been played by the

externalisms of ceremonial, she had pierced to the core of religion.

Advanced modern critics admit the antiquity of Deborah's song, and this

closing stanza witnesses to the existence, at that early period, of a

highly spiritual conception of the bond between God and man. Deborah

had got as far, in a moment of exaltation and insight, as the teaching

of the Apostle John, although her thought was strangely blended with

the fierceness of the times in which she lived. Her approval of Jael's

deed by no means warrants our approving it, but we may thankfully see

that though she felt the fierce throbbing of desire for vengeance, she

also felt this--Them that love Him; that is the Alpha and the Omega of

all.'

Our love must depend on our knowledge. Deborah's knowledge was a mere

skeleton outline as compared with ours. Contrast the fervour of

emotional affection that manifestly throbbed in her heart with the

poor, cold pulsations which we dignify by the name of love, and the

contrast may put us to shame. There is a religion of fear which

dominates hundreds of professing Christians in this land of ours. There

is a religion of duty, in which there is no delight, which has many

adherents amongst us. There is a religion of form, which contents

itself with the externals of Christianity, and that is the religion of

many men and women in all our churches. And I may further say, there is

a religion of faith, in its narrower and imperfect sense, which lays

hold of and believes a body of Christian truth, and has never passed

through faith into love. Not he who believes that God is,' and comes to

Him with formal service and an alienated or negligent heart; not he who

recognises the duty of worship, and discharges it because his

conscience pricks him, but has no buoyancy within bearing him upwards

towards the object of his love; not he who cowers before the dark

shadow which some call God; but he who, knowing, trusts, and who,

knowing and trusting the love which God hath to us,' pulses back the

throbs of a recipient heart, and loves Him in return--he, and he only,

is a worshipper. Let us learn the lesson that Deborah learnt below the

palm-trees of Lapidoth, and if we want to understand what a religious

man is, recognise that he is a man who loves God.

II. Further, note the grand conception of the character which such a

love produces.

Let them be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might.' Think of the

fierce Eastern sun, with sunbeams like swords,' that springs up from

the East, and rushes to the zenith, and nothing is hid from the heat

thereof'--a sun the like of which we, in our cloudy skies, never see

nor feel, but which, to the Oriental, is the very emblem of splendour

and of continuous, victorious power. There are two things here,

radiance and energy, light and might.

As the sun when he goeth forth in his strength.' Deborah was a

prophetess,' and people say, What did she prophesy?' Well, she

prophesied the heart of religion--as I have tried to show--in reference

to its essence, and, as one sees by this phrase, in reference to its

effects. What is her word but a partial anticipation of Christ's

saying, Ye are the light of the world'; and of His disciple's

utterance, Ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the

Lord: walk as children of light'?

It is too plain to need any talking about, that the direct tendency of

what we venture to call love to God, meaning thereby the turning of the

whole nature to Him, in aspiration, admiration, longing for likeness,

and practical imitation, is to elevate, ennoble, and illuminate the

whole character. It was said about one woman that to love her was an

education.' That was exaggeration; but it is below the truth about God.

The true way to refine and elevate and educate is to cultivate love to

God. And when we get near to Him, and hold by Him, and are continually

occupied with Him; when our being is one continual aspiration after

union with Him, and we experience the glow and rapture included in the

simple word love,' then it cannot but be that we shall be like Him.

That is what Paul meant when he said, Now are ye light in the Lord.'

Union with Him illuminates. The true radiance of saintly character will

come in the measure in which we are in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Deborah's astronomy was not her strong point. The sun shines by its own

light. We are planets, and are darkness in ourselves, and it is only

the reflection of the central sun that ever makes us look silvery white

and radiant before men. But though it be derived, it is none the less

our light, if it has passed into us, as it surely will, and if it

streams out from us, as it no less surely will, in the measure in which

love to God dominates our whole lives.

If that is so, dear brethren, is not the shortest and the surest way to

have our faces shining like that of Moses when he came down from the

mountain, or like Stephen's when he saw the heavens opened,' to keep

near Jesus Christ? It is slow work to hammer bits of ore out of the

rock with a chisel and a mallet. Throw the whole mass into the furnace,

and the metal will come out separated from the dross. Get up the heat,

and the light, which is the consequence of the heat, will take care of

itself. In the Lord' ye shall be light.'

Is Deborah's aspiration fulfilled about me? Let each of us ask that. As

the sun when he goeth forth in his strength'--would anybody say that

about my Christian character? Why not? Only because the springs have

run low within is the stream low through the meadows. Only because the

love is cold is the light feeble.

There is another thought here. There is power in sunlight as well as

radiance. On that truth the prophetess especially lays a finger; as the

sun when he goeth forth in his strength.' She did not know what we

know, that solar energy is the source of all energy on this earth, and

that, just as in the deepest spiritual analysis there is no power but

of God,' so in the material region we may say that the only force is

the force of the sun, which not only stimulates vegetation and brings

light and warmth--as the pre-scientific prophetess knew--but in a

hundred other ways, unknown to her and known to modern science, is the

author of all change, the parent of all life, and the reservoir of all

energy.

So we come to this thought: The true love of God is no weak,

sentimental thing, such as narrow and sectional piety has often

represented it to be, but it is a power which will invigorate the whole

of a man, and make him strong and manly as well as gentle and gracious;

being, indeed, the parent of all the so-called heroic and of all the

so-called saintly virtues.

The sun goeth forth in his strength,' rushing through the heavens to

the zenith. As one of the other editions of this metaphor in the Old

Testament has it, The path of the just is as the shining light, that

shineth more and more until the noontide of the day.' That light,

indeed, declines, but that fact does not come into view in the metaphor

of the progressive growth towards perfection of the man in whom is the

all-conquering might of the true love of Jesus Christ.

Note the context of these words of our text, which, I said, presents so

singular a contrast to them. It is a strange thing that so fierce a

battle-chant should at the end settle down into such a sweet swan-song

as this. It is a strange thing that in the same soul there should throb

the delight in battle and almost the delight in murder, and these lofty

thoughts. But let us learn the lesson that true love to God means

hearty hatred of God's enemy, and that it will always have to be

militant and sometimes stern and what people call fierce. Amidst the

amenities and sentimentalities of modern life there is much necessity

for remembering that the Apostle of love was a son of thunder,' and

that it was the lips which summoned Israel to the fight, and chanted

hymns of triumph over the corpses borne down by the rushing Kishon,

which also said: Let them that love Him be as the sun when he shineth

forth in his strength.' If you love God, you will surely be a strong

man as well as an emotional and affectionate Christian.

That energy is to be continuous and progressive. The sun that Deborah

saw day by day spring from his station in the east, and climb to his

height in the heavens, and ray down his beams, has been doing that for

millions of years, and it will probably keep doing it for uncounted

periods still. And so the Christian man, with continuity unbroken and

progressive brilliance and power, should shine more and more till the

unsetting noontide of the day.'

III. That brings me to the last thought, which passes beyond the limits

of the prophetess' vision. Here is a prophecy of which the utterer was

unaware.

There is a contrast drawn in the words of our text and in those

immediately preceding. "So," says Deborah, after the fierce description

of the slaughter of Sisera--So let all Thine enemies perish, O Lord!

but let them that love Thee be as the sun when he shineth in his

strength.' She contrasts the transiency of the lives that pit

themselves against God with the perpetuity that belongs to those which

are in harmony with Him. The truth goes further than she probably knew;

certainly further than she was thinking when she chanted these words.

Let us widen them by other words which use the same metaphor, and say,

they that be wise'--that is a shallower word than them that love

Thee'--they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the

firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for

ever and ever.' Let us widen and deepen them by sacreder words still;

for Jesus Christ laid hold of this old metaphor, and said, describing

the time when all the enemies shall have perished, and the weeds have

been flung out of the vineyard, Then shall the righteous shine forth

like the sun, in the Kingdom of their Father,' with a brilliancy that

will fill heaven with new splendours, bright beyond all that we see

here amidst the thick atmosphere and mists and clouds of the present

life!

Nor need we stop even there, for Jesus Christ not only laid hold of

this metaphor in order to describe the eternal glory of the children of

the Kingdom, but at the last time that human eyes on earth saw Him, the

glorified Man Christ Jesus is thus described: His countenance was as

the sun shineth in his strength.' Love always tends to likeness; and

love to Christ will bring conformity with Him. The perfect love of

heaven will issue in perfect and perpetual assimilation to Him. Science

tells us that the light of the sun probably comes from its contraction;

and that that process of contraction will go on until, at some point

within the bounds of time, though far beyond the measure of our

calculations, the sun himself shall die, the ineffectual beams will be

paled, and there will be a black orb, with neither life nor light nor

power. And then, then, and after that for ever, they that love Him'

shall continue to be as that dead sun once was, when he went forth in

his hot might.

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GIDEON'S ALTAR

Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it

Jehovah-shalom [God is peace].'--JUDGES vi. 24.

I need not tell over again, less vividly, the picturesque story in this

chapter, of the simple husbandman up in the hills, engaged furtively in

threshing out a little wheat in some hollow in the rock where he might

hide it from the keen eyes of the oppressors; and of how the angel of

the Lord, unrecognised at first, appeared to him; and gradually there

dawned upon his mind the suspicion of who He was who spoke. Then follow

the offering, the discovery by fire, the shrinking of the man from

contact with the divine, the wonderfully tranquillizing and

condescending assurance, cast into the form of the ordinary salutation

of domestic life: And the Lord said unto him Peace be unto thee!'--as

any man might have said to any other--fear not! thou shalt not die.'

Then Gideon piles up the unhewn stones on the hillside into a rude

altar, apparently not for the purpose of offering sacrifice, but for a

monument, to which is given this strange name, strange upon such

warrior lips, and strange in contemplation of the fierce conflict into

which he was immediately to plunge, the Lord is peace.'

How I think that this name, imposed for such a reason and under such

circumstances, may teach us a good many things.

I. The first thing that it seems to me to suggest is the great

discovery which this man had made, and in the rapture of which he named

his altar,--that the sight of God is not death, but life and peace.

Gideon was a plain, rude man, with no very deep religious experience.

Apparently up to the moment of this vision he had been contentedly

tolerating the idolatrous practices which had spread over all the

country. He had heard of Jehovah.' It was a name, a tradition, which

his fathers had told him. That was all that he knew of the God of

Israel. Into this hearsay religion, as in a flash, while Gideon is busy

about his threshing floor, thinking of his wheat or of the misery of

his nation, there comes, all at once, this crushing conviction,--the

hearsay God is beside you, speaking to you! You have personal relations

to Him, He is nearer you than any human being is, He is no mere Name,

here He stands!'

And whenever the lightning edge of a conviction like that cuts its way

through the formalisms and traditionalisms and hearsay repetitions of

conventional religion, then there comes what came to Gideon, the swift

thought, And if this be true, if I really do touch, and am touched by,

that living Person whose name is Jehovah, what is to become of me?

Shall I not shrivel up when His fiery finger is laid upon me? I have

seen Him face to face, and I must die.'

I believe that, in the case of the vast majority of men, the first

living, real apprehension of a real, living God is accompanied with a

shock, and has mingled with it something of awe, and even of terror.

Were there no sin there would be no fear, and pure hearts would open in

silent blessedness and yield their sweetest fragrance of love and

adoration, when shone on by Him, as flowers do to the kiss of the

sunbeams. But, taking into account the sad and universal fact of sin,

it is inevitable that men should shrink from the Light which reveals

their evil, and that the consciousness of God's presence should strike

a chill. It is sad that it should be so. But it is sadder still when it

is not so, but when, as is sometimes the case, the sight of God

produces no sense of sin, and no consciousness of discord, or

foreboding of judgment. For, only through that valley of the shadow of

death lies the path to the happy confidence of peace with God, and

unless there has been trembling at the beginning, there will be no firm

and reasonable trust afterwards.

For Gideon's terror opened the way for the gracious proclamation, which

would have been needless but for it--Peace be unto thee; fear not, thou

shalt not die.'

The sight of God passes from being a fear to a joy, from being a

fountain of death to a spring of life, Terror is turned to tranquil

trust. The narrow and rough path of conscious unworthiness leads to the

large place of happy peace. The divine word fits Gideon's condition,

and corresponds to his then deepest necessity; and so he drinks it in

as the thirsty ground drinks in the water; and in the rapture of the

discovery that the Name, that had come down from his fathers to him,

was the Name of a real Person, with whom he stood in real

relationships, and those of simple friendship and pure amity, he piles

up the rough stones of the place, and makes the name of his altar the

echo of the divine voice. It is as if he had said with rapture of

surprise, Then Jehovah is peace; which I never dreamed of before.'

Dear friends, do you know anything of such an experience? Can you build

your altar, and give it this same name? Can you write upon the memorial

of your experiences, The Lord is my peace'? Have you passed from

hearsay into personal contact? Can you say, I have heard of Thee by the

hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee'? Do you know the

further experience expressed in the subsequent words of the same

quotation: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes'? And

have you passed out of that stormy ocean of terror and

self-condemnation into the quiet haven of trust in Him in whom we have

peace with God, where your little boat lies quiet, moored for ever to

the Rock of Ages, to Jehovah, who is Peace'?

In connection with this rapturous discovery, and to Gideon strange new

thought, we may gather the lesson that peace with God will give peace

in all the soul. The peace with God' will pass into a wider thing, the

peace of God.' There is tranquillity in trust. There is rest in

submission. There is repose in satisfied desires. When we live near

Him, and have ceased from our own works, and let Him take control of us

and direct us in all our ways, then the storms abate. The things that

disturb us are by no means so much external as inward; and there is a

charm and a fascination in the thought, the Lord is peace,' which

stills the inward tempest, and makes us quiet, waiting upon His will

and drawing in His grace. The secret of rest is to cease from self,

from self as guide, from self as aim, from self as safety. And when

self-will is cast out, and self-dependence is overcome, and

self-reliance is sublimed into hanging upon God's hand, and when He,

not mine own inclination, is my Director, and the Arbiter of my fate,

then all the fever of unrest is swept wholly out of my heart, and there

is nothing left in it on which the gnawing tooth of anxiety or of care

can prey. God being my peace, and I yielding myself to Him, in

quietness and confidence' is my strength.' Thou shalt keep him in

perfect peace whose mind is stayed upon Thee, because he trusteth in

Thee.'

II. We may look upon this inscription from another point of view, as

suggesting the thought that God's peace is the best preparation for,

and may be experienced in the midst of, the intensest conflict.

Remember what the purpose of this vision was,--to raise up a man to

fight an almost desperate fight, no metaphorical war, but one with real

sharp swords, against real strong enemies. The first blow in the

campaign was to be struck that night. Gideon was being summoned by the

vision, to long years of hardship and bitter warfare, and his

preparation for the conflict consisted largely in the revelation to his

inmost spirit that Jehovah is peace.' We might rather have looked for a

manifestation of the divine nature as ready to go forth to battle with

the raw levies of timid peasants. We should have expected the thought

which inspired their captain to have been The Lord is a man of war,'

rather than The Lord is peace.' But it is not so--and therein lies the

deep truth that the peace of God is the best preparation for strife. It

gives courage, it leaves the heart at leisure to fling all its power

into the conflict, it inspires with the consciousness of a divine ally.

As Paul puts it, in his picture of the fully-armed Christian soldier,

the feet are shod with the preparedness of alacrity which is produced

by the gospel of peace.' That will make us ready, aye ready' for the

roughest march, and enable us to stand firm against the most violent

charges of the enemy. There is no such preparation for the conflict of

life, whether it be waged against our own inward evil, or against

opposing forces without, as to have deep within the soul the settled

and substantial peace of God. If we are to come out of the battle with

victory sitting on our helmets, we must go into it with the Dove of God

brooding in our hearts. As the Lord said to Gideon, Go in this thy

might, and thou shalt save Israel, . . . have not I sent thee?'

But, besides this thought that the knowledge of Jehovah as peace fits

us for strife, that hastily-reared altar with its seemingly

inappropriate name, may remind us that it is possible, in the midst of

the deadliest hand-to-hand grip with evil, and whilst fighting the good

fight of faith' with the most entire self-surrender to the divine will,

to bear within us, deeper than all the surface strife, that inward

tranquillity which knows no disturbance, though the outward life is

agitated by fierce storms. Deep in the centre of the ocean the waters

lie quiet, though the wildest tempests are raging above, and the

fiercest currents running. Over the tortured and plunging waters of the

cataract there lies unmoving, though its particles are in perpetual

flux, the bow of promise and of peace. So over all the rush and thunder

of life there may stretch, radiant and many-coloured, and dyed with

beauty by the very sun himself, the abiding bow of beauty, the emblem

and the reality of the divine tranquillity. The Christian life is

continual warfare, but in it all, the peace of God which passeth

understanding' may garrison our hearts and minds.' In the inmost keep

of the castle, though the storm of war may be breaking against the

walls, there will be a quiet chamber where no noise of the archers can

penetrate, and the shouts of the fight are never heard. Let us seek to

live in the secret place of the Most High'; and in still communion with

Him, keep our inmost souls in quiet, while we bravely front

difficulties and enemies. You are to be God's warriors; see to it that

on every battlefield there stands the altar Jehovah Shalom.'

III. Lastly, we may draw yet another lesson, and say that that altar,

with its significant inscription, expressed the aim of the conflict and

the hope which sustains in the fight.

Gideon was fighting for peace, and what he desired was that victory

should bring tranquillity. The hope which beckoned him on, when he

flung himself into his else desperate enterprise, was that God would so

prosper his work that the swords might be beaten into ploughshares, and

the spears into pruning hooks. Which things may stand as an allegory,

and suggest to us that the Christian warfare, whilst it rests upon, and

is prompted by, the revelation of God who is peace, aims in all its

blows, at the conquering of that sure and settled peace which shall be

broken by no rebellious outbursts of self-will, nor by any risings of

passions and desires. The aim of our warfare should ever be that the

peace of God may be throned in our hearts, and sit there a gentle

queen. The true tranquillity of the blessed life is the prize of

conflict. David, the man of war from his youth,' prepares the throne

for Solomon, in whose reign no alarms of war are heard. If you would

enter into peace, you must fight your way to it, and every step of the

road must be a battle. The land of peace is won by the good fight of

faith.

But Gideon's altar not only expressed his purpose in his taking up

arms, but his confidence of accomplishing it, based upon the assurance

that the Lord would give peace. It was a trophy erected before the

fight, and built, not by arrogant presumption or frivolous

underestimate of the enemy's strength, but by humble reliance on the

power of that Lord who had promised His presence, and had assured

triumph. So the hope that named this altar was the hope that war meant

victory, and that victory would bring peace. That hope should animate

every Christian soldier. Across the dust of the conflict, the fair

vision of unbroken and eternal peace should gleam before each of us,

and we should renew fainting strength and revive drooping courage by

many a wistful gaze.

We may realise that hope in large measure here. But its fulfilment is

reserved for the land of peace which we enter by the last conflict with

the last enemy.

Every Christian man's gravestone is an altar on which is written Our

God is peace'; in token that the warrior has passed into the land where

violence shall no more be heard, wasting, nor destruction within its

borders,' but all shall be deep repose, and the unarmed, because

unattacked, peace of tranquil communion with, and likeness to, Jehovah

our Peace.'

So, dear brethren, let us pass from tradition and hearsay into personal

intercourse with God, and from shrinking and doubt into the sunshine of

the conviction that He is our peace. And then, with His tranquillity in

our hearts let us go out, the elect apostles of the peace of God, and

fight for Him, after the pattern of the Captain of our salvation, who

had to conquer peace through conflict; and was first of all King of

Righteousness, and after that also King of Peace.'

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GIDEON'S FLEECE

Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on

the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I

know that Thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as Thou hast

said.'--JUDGES vi. 37.

The decisive moment had come when Gideon, with his hastily gathered raw

levies, was about to plunge down to the plain to face immensely

superior forces trained to warfare. No wonder that the equally

untrained leader's heart heat faster. Many a soldier, who will be

steadfastly brave in the actual shock of battle, has tremors and

throbbings on its eve. Gideon's hand shook a little as he drew his

sword.

I. Gideon's request.

His petition for a sign was not the voice of unbelief or of doubt or of

presumption, but in it spoke real, though struggling faith, seeking to

be confirmed. Therefore it was not regarded by God as a sin. When a

wicked and adulterous generation asked for a sign,' no sign was given

it, but when faith asks for one to help it to grasp God's hand, and to

go on His warfare in His strength and as His instrument, it does not

ask in vain.

Gideon's prayer was wrapped, as it were, in an enfolding promise, for

it is preceded and followed by the quotation of words of the Angel of

the Lord who had looked on him,' and said, Go in this thy might and

save Israel from the hand of Midian: have not I sent thee?' Prayers

that begin and end with as Thou hast spoken' are not likely to be

repulsed.

II. God's answer.

God wonderfully allows Gideon to dictate the nature of the sign. He

stoops to work it both ways, backwards and forwards, as it were. First

the fleece is to be wet and the ground to be dry, then the fleece is to

be dry and the ground wet. Miracle was a necessary accompaniment of

revelation in those early days, as picture-books are of childhood. But,

though we are far enough from being men' in Christ, yet we have not the

same need for childish things' as Gideon and his contemporaries had. We

have Christ and the Spirit, and so have a word made more sure' than to

require signs. But still it is true that the same gracious willingness

to help a tremulous faith, which carries its tremulousness to God in

prayer, moves the Father's heart to-day, and that to such petitions the

answer is given even before they are offered: Ask what ye will, and it

shall be done unto you.' No sign that eyes can see is given, but inward

whispers speak assurance and communicate the assurance which they

speak.

III. The meaning of the sign.

Many explanations have been offered. The main point is that the fleece

is to be made different from the soil around it. It is to be a proof of

God's power to endow with characteristics not derived from, and

resulting in qualities unlike, the surroundings.

Gideon had no thought of any significance beyond that. But we may

allowably let the Scripture usage of the symbol of dew influence our

reading into the symbol a deeper meaning than it bore to him.

God makes the fleece wet with dew, while all the threshing-floor is

dry. Dew is the symbol of divine grace, of the silently formed moisture

which, coming from no apparent source, freshens by night the wilted

plants, and hangs in myriad drops, that twinkle into green and gold as

the early sunshine strikes them, on the humblest twig. That grace is

plainly not a natural product nor to be accounted for by environment.

The dew of the Spirit, which God and God only, can give, can freshen

our worn and drooping souls, can give joy in sorrow, can keep us from

being touched by surrounding evils, and from being parched by

surrounding drought, can silently distil' its supplies of strength

according to our need into our else dry hearts.

The wet fleece on the dry ground was not only a revelation of God's

power, but may be taken as a pattern of what God's soldiers must ever

be. A prophet long after Gideon said: The remnant of Jacob shall be in

the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord,' bringing to others the

grace which they have received that they may diffuse it, and turning

the dry and thirsty land where no water is into fertility, and the

parched ground' into a pool.'

We have said that the main point of Gideon's petition was that the

fleece should be made unlike the threshing-floor, and that that

unlikeness, which could obviously not be naturally brought about, was

to be to him the sure token that God was at work to produce it. The

strongest demonstration that the Church can give the world of its

really being God's Church is its unlikeness to the world. If it is wet

with divine dew when all the threshing-floor is dry, and if, when all

the floor is drenched with poisonous miasma, it is dry from the

diffused and clinging malaria, the world will take knowledge of it, and

some souls be set to ask how this unlikeness comes. When Haman has to

say: There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the

peoples . . . and their laws are diverse from those of every people,'

he may meditate murder, but many from among the people of the land'

will join their ranks. Gideon may or may not have thought of the fleece

as a symbol of his little host, but we may learn from it the old

lesson, Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the

renewing of your minds.'

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FIT, THOUGH FEW'

Then Jerubbaal, who is Gideon, and all the people that were with him,

rose up early, and pitched beside the well of Harod: so that the host

of the Midianites were on the north side of them, by the hill of Moreh,

in the valley. 2. And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are

with thee are too many for Me to give the Midianites into their hands,

lest Israel vaunt themselves against Me, saying, Mine own hand hath

saved me. 3. Now therefore go to, proclaim in the ears of the people,

saying, Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart

early from mount Gilead. And there returned of the people twenty and

two thousand; and there remained ten thousand. 4. And the Lord said

unto Gideon, The people are yet too many; bring them down unto the

water, and I will try them for thee there: and it shall be, that of

whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with

thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee. This shall not go with thee,

the same shall not go. 5. So he brought down the people unto the water:

and the Lord said unto Gideon, Every one that lappeth of the water with

his tongue, as a dog lappeth, him shalt thou set by himself; likewise

every one that boweth down upon his knees to drink. 6. And the number

of them that lapped, putting their hand to their mouth, were three

hundred men: but all the rest of the people bowed down upon their knees

to drink water. 7. And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred

men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine

hand: and let all the other people go every man unto his place. 8. So

the people took victuals in their hand, and their trumpets: and he sent

all the rest of Israel every man unto his tent, and retained those

three hundred men. And the host of Midian was beneath him in the

valley.'--JUDGES vii. 1-8.

Gideon is the noblest of the judges. Courage, constancy, and caution

are strongly marked in his character. The youngest son of an obscure

family in a small tribe, he humbly shrinks from the task imposed on

him,--not from cowardice or indolence, but from conscious weakness. Men

who are worthy to do such work as his are never forward to begin it,

nor backward in it when they are sure that it is God's will. He began

his war against Midian by warring against Baal, whose worship had

brought the oppressor. If any thorough deliverance from the misery

which departure from God has wrought is to be effected, we must destroy

the idols before we attack the spoilers. Cast out sin, and you cast out

sorrow. So he first earns his new name of Jerubbaal (Let Baal plead'),

and is known as Baal's antagonist, before he blows the trumpet of

revolt. The name is an omen of victory. The hand that had smitten the

idol, and had not been withered, would smite Midian. Therefore that new

name is used in this chapter, which tells of the preparations for the

fight and its triumphant issue. From his home among the hills, he had

sent the fiery cross to the three northern tribes, who had been the

mainstay of Deborah's victory, and who now rallied around Gideon to the

number of thirty-two thousand. The narrative shows us the two armies

confronting each other on the opposite slopes of the valley of Jezreel,

where it begins to dip steeply towards the Jordan. Gideon and his men

are on the south side of the valley, above the fountain of Harod, or

Trembling,' apparently so called from the confessed terror which

thinned his army. The word is afraid,' in verse 3, comes from the same

root. On the other side of the glen, not far from the site of the

Philistine camp on the day of Saul's last defeat, lay the

far-stretching camp of the invaders, outnumbering Israel by four to

one. For seven years these Midianite marauders had paralysed Israel,

and year by year had swarmed up this valley from the eastern desert,

and thence by the great plain had penetrated into every corner of the

land, as far south as Gaza, devouring like locusts. It is the same easy

route by which, to this day, the Bedouin find their way into Palestine,

whenever the weak Turkish Government is a little weaker or more corrupt

than usual. Apparently, the Midianites were on their homeward march,

laden with spoil, and very contemptuous of the small force across the

valley, who, on their part, had not shaken off their terror of the

fierce nomads who had used them as they pleased for seven years.

I. Note, as the first lesson taught here, the divinely appointed

disproportion between means and end, and its purpose. Many an Israelite

would look across to the long lines of black tents, and think, We are

too few for our task'; but to God's eye they were too many, and the

first necessity was to weed them out. The numbers must be so reduced

that the victory shall be unmistakably God's, not theirs. The same sort

of procedure, and for the same reason, runs through all God's dealings.

It is illustrated in a hundred Scripture instances, and is stated most

plainly by Paul in his triumphant eloquence. He revels in telling how

foolish, weak, base things, that are no things in the world's estimate,

have been chosen to cover with shame wise, strong, honoured things,

which seem to be somewhat; and he gives the same reason as our lesson

does, that no flesh should glory in His presence.' Eleven poor men on

one side, and all the world on the other, made fearful odds. The more

unevenly matched are the respective forces, the more plainly does the

victory of the weaker demand for its explanation the intervention of

God. The old sneer, that Providence is always on the side of the

strongest battalions,' is an audacious misreading of history, and is

the very opposite of the truth. It is the weak battalions which win in

the long run, for the history of every good cause is the same. First,

it kindles a fire in the hearts of two or three nobodies, who are

burned in earlier times, and laughed at as fools, fanatics,

impracticable dreamers, in later ages, but whose convictions grow till,

one day, the world wakes up to find that everybody believes them, and

then it builds the tombs of the prophets.'

Why should God desire that there shall be no mistake as to who wins the

battle? The answer may very easily be so given as to make what is

really a token of His love become an unlovely and repellent trait in

His character. It is not eagerness for praise that moves Him, but

longing that men may have the blessedness of recognising His hand

fighting for them. It is for Israel's sake that He is so solicitous to

deliver them from the delusion of their having won the victory. It is

because He loves us and would fain have us made restful, confident, and

strong, in the assurance of His fighting for us, that He takes pains so

to order the history of His Church in the world, that it is one long

attestation of the omnipotence of weakness when His power flows through

it. To say Mine own hand hath saved me,' is to lose unspeakable peace

and blessing; to say Not I, but the grace of God in me,' is to be

serene and of good cheer in the face of outnumbering foes, and sure of

victory in all conflicts. Therefore God is careful to save us from

self-gratulation and self-confidence.

One lesson we may learn from this thinning of the ranks; namely, that

we need not be anxious to count heads, when we are sure that we are

doing His work, nor even be afraid of being in a minority. Minorities

are generally right when they are the apostles of new thoughts, though

the minorities which cleave to some old fossil are ordinarily wrong.

The prophet and his man were alone and ringed around with enemies, when

he said, They that be with us are more than they that be with them';

and yet he was right, for the mountain was full of horses and chariots

of fire. Let us be sure that we are on God's side, and then let us not

mind how few are in the ranks with us, nor be afraid, though the

far-extended front of the enemy threatens to curl around our flanks and

enclose us. The three hundred heroes had God with them, and that was

enough.

II. Note the self-applied test of courage which swept away so much

chaff. According to Deuteronomy xx. 8, the standing enactment was that

such a proclamation as that in verse 3 should precede every battle.

Much difficulty has been raised about the mention of Mount Gilead here,

as the only Mount Gilead otherwise mentioned in Scripture lay to the

east of Jordan. But perhaps the simplest solution is the true one,-that

there was another hilly region so named on the western side. The map of

the Palestine Exploration Fund attaches the name to the northern slopes

of the western end of Gilboa, where Gideon was now encamped, and that

is probably right. Be that as it may, the effect of the proclamation

was startling. Two-thirds of the army melted away. No doubt, many who

had flocked to Gideon's standard felt their valour oozing out at their

finger ends, when they came close to the enemy, and saw their long

array across the valley. It must have required some courage to confess

being afraid, but the cowards were numerous enough to keep each other

in countenance. Two out of three were panic-struck. I wonder if the

proportion would be less in Christ's army to-day, if professing

Christians were as frank as Gideon's men?

Why were the fearful' dismissed? Because fear is contagious; and, in

undisciplined armies like Gideon's, panic, once started, spreads

swiftly, and becomes frenzied confusion. The same thing is true in the

work of the Church to-day. Who that has had much to do with guiding its

operations has not groaned over the dead weight of the timid and

sluggish souls, who always see difficulties and never the way to get

over them? And who that has had to lead a company of Christian men has

not often been ready to wish that he could sound out Gideon's

proclamation, and bid the fearful and afraid' take away the chilling

encumbrance of their presence, and leave him with thinned ranks of

trusty men? Cowardice, dressed up as cautious prudence, weakens the

efficiency of every regiment in Christ's army.

Another reason for getting rid of the fearful is that fear is the

opposite of faith, and that therefore, where it is uppermost, the door

by which God's power can enter to strengthen is closed. Not that faith

must be free of all admixture of fear, but that it must subdue fear, if

a man is to be God's warrior, fighting in His strength. Many a tremor

would rock the hearts of the ten thousand who remained, but they so

controlled their terror that it did not overcome their faith. We do not

need, for our efficiency in Christ's service, complete exemption from

fear, but we do need to make the psalmist's resolve ours: I will trust,

and not be afraid.' Terror shuts the door against the entrance of the

grace which makes us conquerors, and so fulfils its own forebodings;

faith opens the door, and so fulfils its own confidences.

III. Note the final test. God required but few men, but He required

that these should be fit. The first test had sifted out the brave and

willing. The liquor was none the less, though so much froth had been

blown off. As Thomas Fuller says, there were fewer persons, but not

fewer men,' after the poltroons had disappeared. The second test, a

purgatory of water,' as the same wise and witty author calls it, was

still more stringent. The dwindled ranks were led down from their camp

on the slopes to the fountain and brook which lay in the valley near

the Midianites' camp. Gideon alone seems to have known that a test was

to be applied there; but he did not know what it was to be till they

reached the spring, and the soldiers did not know that they were

determining their fate when they drank. The two ways of drinking

clearly indicated a difference in the men. Those who glued their lips

to the stream and swilled till they were full, were plainly more

self-indulgent, less engrossed with their work, less patient of fatigue

and thirst, than those who caught up enough in their curved palms to

moisten their lips without stopping in their stride or breaking rank.

The former test was self-applied, and consciously so. This is no less

self-applied, though unconsciously. God shuts out no man from His army,

but men shut themselves out; sometimes knowingly, by avowed

disinclination for the warfare, sometimes unknowingly, by

self-indulgent habits, which proclaim their unfitness.

The great lesson taught here is that self-restraint in the use of the

world's goods is essential to all true Christian warfare. There are two

ways of looking at and partaking of these. We may either drink for

strength' or for drunkenness' .Life is to some men first a place for

strenuous endeavour, and only secondly a place of refreshment. Such

think of duty first and of water afterwards. To them, all the innocent

joys and pleasures of the natural life are as brooks by the way, of

which Christ's soldier should drink, mainly that he may be

re-invigorated for conflict. There are others whose conception of life

is a scene of enjoyment, for which work is unfortunately a necessary

but disagreeable preliminary. One does not often see such a character

in its pure perfection of sensualism; but plenty of approximations to

it are visible, and ugly sights they are. The roots of it are in us

all; and it cannot be too strongly insisted on that, unless it be

subdued, we cannot enlist in Christ's army, and shall never be counted

worthy to be His instruments. Such self-restraint is especially needful

to be earnestly inculcated on young men and women, to whom life is

opening as if it were a garden of delight, whose passions are strong,

whose sense is keen, whose experience is slender, and to whom all

earth's joys appeal more strongly than they do to those who have drunk

of the cup, and know how bitter is its sediment. It is especially

needful to be pealed into the ears of a generation like ours, in which

senseless luxury, the result of wealth which has increased faster than

the power of rightly using it, has attained such enormous proportions,

and is threatening, in commercial communities especially, to drown all

noble aspirations, and Spartan simplicity, and Christian self-devotion,

in its muddy flood. Surely never was Gideon's test more wanted for the

army of the Lord of hosts than it is to-day.

Such self-restraint gives double sweetness to enjoyments, which, when

partaken of more freely, pall on the jaded palate. The full soul

loatheth a honeycomb; but to the hungry soul every bitter thing is

sweet.' The senses are kept fine-edged, and the rare holidays are

sweeter because they are rare. The most refined prudence of the mere

sensualist would prescribe the same regimen as the Christian moralist

does. But from how different a motive! Christ calls for self-restraint

that we may be fit organs for His power, and bids us endure hardness

that we may be good soldiers of His. If we know anything of the true

sweetness of His fellowship and service, it will not be hard to drink

sparingly of earthly fountains, when we have the river of His pleasures

to drink from; nor will it be painful sacrifice to cast away imitation

jewels, in order to clasp in our hands the true riches of His love and

imparted life.

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A BATTLE WITHOUT A SWORD

And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream

unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake

of barley-bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent,

and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along.

14. And his fellow answered and said, This is nothing else save the

sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand

hath God delivered Midian, and all the host. 15, And it was so, when

Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof,

that he worshipped, and returned into the host of Israel, and said,

Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.

16. And he divided the three hundred men into three companies, and he

put a trumpet in every man's hand, with empty pitchers, and lamps

within the pitchers. 17. And be said unto them, Look on me, and do

likewise: and, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall

be, that as I do, so shall ye do. 18. When I blow with a trumpet, I and

all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of

all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 19. So

Gideon, and the hundred men that were with him, came unto the outside

of the camp in the beginning of the middle watch; and they had but

newly set the watch: and they blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers

that were in their hands. 20. And the three companies blew the

trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left

hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they

cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon. 21. And they stood every

man in his place round about the camp: and all the host ran, and cried,

and fled. 22. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set

every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host: and

the host fled to Beth-shittah in Zererath, and to the border of

Abel-meholah, unto Tabbath. 23. And the men of Israel gathered

themselves together out of Naphtali, and out of Asher, and out of all

Manasseh, and pursued after the Midianites.'--JUDGES vii. 13-23.

To reduce thirty-two thousand to three hundred was a strange way of

preparing for a fight; and, no doubt, the handful left felt some

sinking of their courage when they looked on their own small number and

then on the widespread Midianite host. Gideon, too, would need

heartening. So the first thing to be noted is the encouragement given

him. God strengthens faith when it needs strengthening, and He has many

ways of doing so. Note that Gideon's visit to the Midianite camp was on

the same night' on which his little band was left alone after the

ordeal by water. How punctually to meet our need, when it begins to be

felt, does God's help come! It was by God's command that he undertook

the daring adventure of stealing down to the camp. We can fancy how

silently he and Phurah crept down the hillside, and, with hushed breath

and wary steps, lest they should stumble on and wake some sleeper, or

even rouse some tethered camel, picked their way among the tents. But

they had God's command and promise, and these make men brave, and turn

what would else be foolhardy into prudence. Ho put his ear to the black

camel's-hair wall of one tent, and heard what his faith could not but

recognise as God's message to him.

The soldier's dream was just such as such a man would dream in such

circumstances. A round loaf of barley (the commonest kind of bread) was

dreamed of as rolling down from a height and upsetting the tent.' The

use of the definite article seems to point to some particular tent,

perhaps simply the one in which the dreamer lay, or perhaps the

general's; but the noun may be used as a collective, and what is meant

may be that the loaf went through the camp, overturning all the tents

in its way. The interpretation needed no Daniel, but the immediate

explanation given, shows not only the transparency of the symbol, but

the dread in the Midianite ranks of Gideon's prowess. A nameless awe,

which goes far to produce the defeat it dreads, was beginning to creep

over them. It finds utterance both in the dream and in its translation.

The tiny loaf worked effects disproportioned to its size. A rock

thundering down the hillside might have mass and momentum enough to

level a line of tents, but one poor loaf to do it! Some mightier than

human hand must have set it going on its career. So the soldier

interprets that God had delivered the army into Gideon's hand.

This dream suggests two or three considerations. In several instances

we find God speaking to those outside Israel by dreams; for example, to

Pharaoh and his two officers, Nebuchadnezzar, Pilate's wife. It is the

lowest form of divine communication, and, like other lower forms, is

not to be looked for when the higher teaching of the Spirit of Christ

is open to us all.

Again, while both dream and interpretation might be accounted for on

simply natural grounds, a deeper insight into the so-called natural'

brings us to see it as all penetrated by the operations of the

ever-present God. And the coincidences which brought Gideon to just

that tent among the thousands along the valley at just the moment when

the two startled sleepers were talking, might well strike Gideon, as

they did, as being God's own fulfilment of the promise that what they

say' would strengthen his hands for the attack (v. 11).

Further, Gideon had already had the sign of the fleece and the dew; but

God does not disdain to let him have an additional encouragement, and

to let him draw confirmation of his own token from the talk of two

Midianites. Faith may be buttressed by men's words, albeit its only

foundation is God's.

Gideon has a place in the muster-roll of heroes of faith in Hebrews

xi., and his whole conduct in this incident proves his right to stand

there. He worshipped,' for his soul went out in trust to God, whose

voice he heard through the two Midianites, and bowed in thankfulness

and submissive obedience. There could be no outward worship there, with

an army of sleepers close by, but the silent uplifting of confidence

and desire reaches God and strengthens the man. So he went back with

new assurance of victory, and roused his sleeping band.

Mark his words as another token of his faith. The Midianite interpreter

had said, God has delivered'; Gideon says, The Lord has delivered.' The

former name is the more general, and is natural on the lips of a

heathen; the latter is the covenant name, and to use it implies

reliance on the Jehovah revealed by His acts to Israel. The Midianite

had said that the host was delivered into Gideon's hand; he says that

it is delivered into the hands of the three hundred, suppressing

himself and honouring them. God's soldiers must be willing to esteem

others better than themselves,' and to fight for God's glory, not their

own. The Midianite had said, This is . . . the sword of Gideon'; he bid

his men cry the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.' It was God's cause

for which they were contending, not his; and yet it was his, inasmuch

as he was God's instrument. Excellent mixture,' says Thomas Fuller,

both joined together; admirable method, God put in the first place.

Where divine blessing leads up the van, and man's valour brings up the

battle, must not victory needs follow in the rear?'

Gideon does not seem to have been divinely directed to the stratagem by

which the Midianites were thrown into panic. He had been promised

victory, but that does not lead him to idle waiting for fulfilment of

the promise. To wait for God's performance in doing nothing is to abuse

that divine providence, which will so work that it will not allow us to

idle' (Bishop Hall). True faith will wisely adopt means to reach

promised ends, and, having used brain and hand as if all depended on

ourselves, will look to Him, as if nothing depended on us, but all on

Him.

There was strong faith as well as daring and skilful generalship in

leading down the three hundred, with no weapons but trumpets and

pitchers, to close quarters with an armed enemy so superior in numbers.

And did it not need some faith, too, not only in Gideon but in God, on

the part of his band, to plunge down the hill on such an errand, each

man with both his hands full, and so unable to strike a blow? The other

three hundred at Thermopylae have been wept over and sung; were not

these three hundred as true heroes? Let us not count heads when we are

called on to take God's side. His soldiers are always in the minority,

but, if He is reckoned in, the minority becomes the majority. They that

be with us are more than they that be with them.'

One can fancy the sleepers starting up dazed by the sudden bray of the

trumpets and the wild shout of that war-cry yelled from every side. As

they stumbled out of their tents, without leaders, without knowledge of

the numbers of their foe, and saw all around the flaring torches, and

heard the trumpet-blasts, which seemed to speak of an immense attacking

force, no wonder that panic shook them, and they fled. Huge mobs of

undisciplined men, as Eastern armies are, and these eminently were, are

especially liable to such infectious alarms; and the larger the force,

the faster does panic spread, the more unmanageable does the army

become, and the more fatal are the results. Each man reflects, and so

increases, his neighbour's fear. Great armies, once struck with

amazement, are like wounded whales. Give them but line enough, and the

fishes will be the fishermen to catch themselves.'

So the host broke up in wild disorder, and hurried in fragments towards

the Jordan fords, trampling each other down as they raced through the

darkness, and each man, as he ran, dreading to feel the enemy's sword

in his back next moment. `The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the

righteous is bold as a lion.' Thus without stroke of weapon was the

victory won. The battle was the Lord's.

And the story is not antiquated in substance, however the form of the

contests which God's soldiers have to-day to fight has changed. Still

it is true that we shall only wage war aright when we feel that it is

His cause for which we contend, and His sword which wins the victory.

If Gideon had put himself first in his warcry, or had put his own name

only in it, the issue would have been different.

May we not also venture to apply the peculiar accoutrements of the

victorious three hundred to ourselves? Christ's men have no weapons to

wield but the sounding out from them, as from a trumpet, of the word of

the Lord, and the light of a Christian life shining through earthen

vessels. If we boldly lift up our voices in the ancient war-cry, and

let that word peal forth from us, and flash the light of holy lives on

a dark world, we may break the sleeper's slumbers to a glad waking, and

win the noblest of victories by leading them to enlist in the army of

our Captain, and to become partakers of His conquests by letting Him

conquer, and thereby save them.

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STRENGTH PROFANED AND LOST

But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him

down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in

the prison-house. 22, Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again

after he was shaven. 23. Then the lords of the Philistines gathered

them together for to offer a great sacrifice unto Dagon their god, and

to rejoice: for they said, Our god hath delivered Samson our enemy into

our hand. 24. And when the people saw him, they praised their god: for

they said, Our god hath delivered into our hands our enemy, and the

destroyer of our country, which slew many of us. 25. And it came to

pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson,

that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the

prison-house; and he made them sport; and they set him between the

pillars. 20. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand.

Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth,

that I may lean upon them. 27. Now the house was full of men and women;

and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon

the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson

made sport. 28. And Samson called unto the Lord, and said, O Lord God,

remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this

once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Phillistines. And he

bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords,

and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at

his death were more than they which he slew in his life. 31. Then his

brethren and all the house of his father came down, and took him, and

brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Ishtaol in the burying

place of Munnah his father. And he judged Israel twenty years.'--JUDGES

xvi. 21-31.

Nobody could be less like the ordinary idea of an Old Testament saint'

than Samson. His gift from the spirit of the Lord' was simply physical

strength, and it was associated with the defects of his qualities. His

passions were strong, and apparently uncontrolled. He had no moral

elevation or religious fervour. He led no army against the Philistines,

nor seems to have had any fixed design of resisting them. He seeks a

wife among them, and is ready to feast and play at riddles with them.

When he does attack them, it is because he is stung by personal

injuries; and it is only with his own arm that he strikes. His exploits

have a mixture of grim humour and fierce hatred quite unlike anything

else in Scripture, and more resembling the horse-play of Homeric or

Norse heroes than the stern purpose and righteous wrath of a soldier

who felt that he was God's instrument. We seem to hear his loud

laughter as he ties the firebrands to the struggling jackals, or swings

the jaw-bone. A strange champion for Jehovah! But we must not leave out

of sight, in estimating his character, the Nazarite vow, which his

parents had made before his birth, and he had endorsed all his life.

That supplies the substratum which is lacking, The unshorn hair and the

abstinence from wine were the signs of consecration to God, which might

often fail of reaching the deepest recesses of the will and spirit, but

still was real, and gave the point of contact for the divine gift of

strength. Samson's strength depended on his keeping the vow, of which

the outward sign was the long, matted locks; and therefore, when he let

these be shorn, he voluntarily cast away his dependence on and

consecration to God, and his strength ebbed from him. He had broken the

conditions on which he received it, and it disappeared. So the story

which connects the loss of his long hair with the loss of his

superhuman power has a worthy meaning, and puts in a picturesque form

an eternal truth.

We see here, first, Samson the prisoner. Milton has caught the spirit

of the sad picture in verses 21 and 22, in that wonderful line,

Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill, with slaves,'

in which the clauses drop heavily like slow tears, each adding a new

touch of woe. The savage manners of the times used the literal forcing

out of the eyes from their sockets as the easiest way of reducing

dangerous enemies to harmlessness. Pitiable as the loss was, Samson was

better blind than seeing. The lust of the eye had led him astray, and

the loss of his sight showed him his sin. Fetters of brass betrayed his

jailers' dread of his possibly returning strength; and the menial task

to which he was set was meant as a humiliation, in giving him woman's

work to do, as if this were all for which the eclipsed hero was now

fit. Generous enemies are merciful; the baser sort reveal their former

terror by the indignities they offer to their prisoner.

In Samson we see an impersonation of Israel. Like him, the nation was

strong so long as it kept the covenant of its God. Like him, it was

ever prone to follow after strange loves. Its Delilahs were the gods of

the heathen, in whose laps it laid its anointed head, and at whose

hands it suffered the loss of its God-given strength; for, like Samson,

Israel was weak when it forgot its consecration, and its punishment

came from the objects of its infatuated desires. Like him, it was

blinded, bound, and reduced to slavery, for all its power was held, as

was his, on condition of loyalty to God. His life is as a mirror, in

which the nation might see their own history reflected; and the lesson

taught by the story of the captive hero, once so strong, and now so

weak, is the lesson which Moses taught the nation: Because thou

servedst not the Lord thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of

heart, by reason of the abundance of all things: therefore shalt thou

serve thine enemies which the Lord shall send against thee, in hunger,

and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things, and He

shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck' (Deut. xxviii. 47, 48). The

blind Samson, chained, at the mill, has a warning for us, too. That is

what God's heroes come to, if once they prostitute the God-given

strength to the base loves of self and the flattering world. We are

strong only as we keep our hearts clear of lower loves, and lean on God

alone. Delilah is most dangerous when honeyed words drop from her lips.

The world's praise is more harmful than its censure. Its favours are

only meant to draw the secret of our strength from us, that we may be

made weak; and nothing gives the Philistines so much pleasure as the

sight of God's warriors caught in their toils and robbed of power.

But Samson's misery was Samson's blessedness. The howbeit' of verse 22

is more than a compensation for all the wretchedness. The growth of his

hair is not there mentioned as a mere natural fact, nor with the

superstitious notion that his hair made him strong. God made him strong

on condition of his keeping his vow of consecration. The long matted

locks were the visible sign that he kept it. Their loss was the

consequence of his own voluntary breach of it. So their growth was the

visible token that the fault was being repaired. Chastisement wrought

sorrow; and in the bondage of the prison he found freedom from the

worse chains of sin, and in its darkness felt the dawning of a better

light. As Bishop Hall puts it: His hair grew together with his

repentance, and his strength with his hair.' The cruelties of the

Philistines were better for him than their kindness. The world outwits

itself when it presses hard on God's deserters, and thus drives them to

repent. God mercifully takes care that His wandering children shall not

have an easy time of it; and his chastisements, at their sharpest, are

calls to us to come back to Him. Well for those, even if in chains, who

know their meaning, and yield to it.

II. We have here Samson,--the occasion of godless triumph. The worst

consequence of the fall of a servant of God is that it gives occasion

for God's enemies to blaspheme, and reflects discredit on Him, as if He

were vanquished. Samson's capture is Dagon's glory. The strife between

Philistia and Israel was, in the eyes of both combatants, a struggle

between their gods; and so the men of Gaza lit their sacrificial fires

and sent up their hymns to their monstrous deity as victor. What would

Samson's bitter thoughts be, as the sound of the wild rejoicings

reached him in his prison? And is not all this true to-day? If ever

some conspicuous Christian champion falls into sin or inconsistency,

how the sky is rent with shouts of malicious pleasure! What paragons of

virtue worldly men become all at once! How swiftly the conclusion is

drawn that all Christians are alike, and none of them any better than

the non-Christian world! How much more harm the one flaw does than all

the good which a life of service has done! The faults of Christians are

the bulwarks of unbelief. `The name of God is blasphemed among the

Gentiles through you.' The honour of Christ is a sacred trust, and it

is in the keeping of us His followers. Our sins do not only darken our

own reputation, but they cloud His. Dagon's worshippers have a right to

rejoice when they have Samson safe in their prison, with his eyes out.

III. We have Samson made a buffoon for drunkards. The feasts of

heathenism were wild orgies, very unlike the pure joy of the

sacrificial meals in Jehovah's worship. Dagon's temple was filled with

a drunken crowd, whose mirth would be made more boisterous by a spice

of cruelty. So, a roar of many voices calls for Samson, and this

deepest degradation is not spared him. The words employed for make

sport' seem to require that we should understand that he was not

brought out to be the passive object of their gibes and drunken

mockery, but was set to play the fool for their delectation. They imply

that he had to dance and laugh, while three thousand gaping

Philistines, any one of whom would have run for his life if he had been

free, fed their hatred by the sight. Perhaps his former reputation for

mirth and riddles suggested this new cruelty. Surely there is no more

pathetic picture than that of the blind hero, with such thoughts as we

know were seething in him, dragged out to make a Philistine holiday,

and set to play the clown, while the bitterness of death was in his

soul. And this is what God's soldiers come down to, when they forget

Him: they that wasted us required of us mirth.'

Wearied with his humiliating exertions, the blind captive begs the boy

who guided him to let him lean, till he can breathe again, on the

pillars that held up the light roof. We need not discuss the probable

architecture of Dagon's temple, of which we know nothing. Only we may

notice that it is not said that there were only two pillars, but rather

necessarily implied that there were more than two, for those against

which he leaned were the two middle' ones. It is quite easy to

understand how, if there were a row of them, knocking out the two

strongest central ones would bring the whole thing down, especially

when there was such a load on the flat roof. Apparently the principal

people were in the best places on the ground floor, sheltered from the

sun by the roof, on which the commonalty were clustered, all waiting

for what their newly discovered mountebank would do next, after he had

breathed himself. The pause was short, and they little dreamed of what

was to follow.

IV. We have the last cry and heroic death of Samson. It is not to be

supposed that his prayer was audible to the crowd, even if it were

spoken aloud. It is not an elevated prayer, but is, like all the rest

of his actions at their best, deeply marked with purely personal

motives. The loss of his two eyes is uppermost in his mind, and he

wants to be revenged for them. Instead of trying to make a lofty hero

out of him, it is far better to recognise frankly the limitations of

his character and the imperfections of his religion. The distance

between him and the New Testament type of God's soldier measures the

progress which the revelation of God's will has made, and the debt we

owe to the Captain of the host for the perfect example which He has

set. The defects and impurity of Samson's zeal, which yet was accepted

of God, preach the precious lesson that God does not require virtues

beyond the standard of the epoch of revelation at which His servants

stand, and that imperfection does not make service unacceptable. If the

merely human passion of vengeance throbbed fiercely in Samson's prayer,

he had never heard Love your enemies'; and, for his epoch, the

destruction of the enemies of God and Israel was duty. He was not the

only soldier of God who has let personal antagonism blend with his zeal

for God; and we have less excuse, if we do it, than he had.

But there is the true core of religion in the prayer. It is penitence

which pleads, Remember me, O Lord God!' He knows that his sin has

broken the flow of loving divine thought to him, but he asks that the

broken current may be renewed. Many a silent tear had fallen from

Samson's blind eyes, before that prayer could have come to his lips, as

he leaned on the great pillars. Clear recognition of the Source of his

strength is in the prayer; if ever he had forgotten, in Delilah's lap,

where it came from, he had recovered his conscious dependence amid the

misery of the prison. There is humility in the prayer Only this once.'

He feels that, after such a fall, no more of the brilliant exploits of

former days are possible. They who have brought such despite on Jehovah

and such honour to Dagon may be forgiven, and even restored to much of

their old vigour, but they must not be judges in Israel any more. The

best thing left for the penitent Samson is death.

He had been unconscious of the departure of his strength, but he seems

to have felt it rushing back into his muscles; so he grasps the two

pillars with his mighty hands; the crowd sees that the pause for breath

is over, and prepares to watch the new feats. Perhaps we may suppose

that his last words were shouted aloud, Let me die with the

Philistines!' and before they have been rightly taken in by the mob, he

sways himself backwards for a moment, and then, with one desperate

forward push, brings down the two supports, and the whole thing rushes

down to hideous ruin amid shrieks and curses and groans. But Samson

lies quiet below the ruins, satisfied to die in such a cause.

He counted not his life dear' unto himself, that he might be God's

instrument for God's terrible work. The last of the judges teaches us

that we too, in a nobler cause, and for men's life, not their

destruction, must be ready to hazard and give our lives for the great

Captain, who in His death has slain more of our foes than He did in His

life, and has laid it down as the law for all His army, He that loseth

his life for My sake shall find it.'

How beautifully the quiet close of the story follows the stormy scene

of the riotous assembly and the sudden destruction. The Philistines,

crushed by this last blow, let the dead hero's kindred search for his

body amid the chaos, and bear it reverently up from the plain to the

quiet grave among the hills of Dan, where Manoah his father slept.

There they lay that mighty frame to rest. It will be troubled no more

by fierce passions or degrading chains. Nothing in his life became him

like the leaving of it. The penitent heroism of its end makes us

lenient to the flaws in its course; and we leave the last of the judges

to sleep in his grave, recognising in him, with all his faults and

grossness, a true soldier of God, though in strange garb.

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THE BOOK OF RUTH

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A GENTLE HEROINE, A GENTILE CONVERT

And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from

following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou

lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my

God: 17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the

Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then

she left speaking unto her. 19. So they two went until they came to

Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem,

that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi?

20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the

Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. 21. I went out full, And the

Lord hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi,

seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath

afflicted me? 22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her

daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab:

and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest.'--RUTH

i. 16-22.

The lovely idyl of Ruth is in sharp contrast with the bloody and

turbulent annals of Judges. It completes, but does not contradict,

these, and happily reminds us of what we are apt to forget in reading

such pages, that no times are so wild but that in them are quiet

corners, green oases, all the greener for their surroundings, where

life glides on in peaceful isolation from the tumult. Men and women

love and work and weep and laugh, the gossips of Bethlehem talk over

Naomi's return (they said,' in verse 19, is feminine), Boaz stands

among his corn, and no sounds of war disturb them. Thank God! the

blackest times were not so dismal in reality as they look in history.

There are clefts in the grim rock, and flowers blooming, sheltered in

the clefts. The peaceful pictures of this little book, multiplied many

thousand times, have to be set as a background to the lurid pictures of

the Book of Judges.

The text begins in the middle of Naomi's remonstrance with her two

daughters-in-law. We need not deal with the former part of the

conversation, nor follow Orpah as she goes back to her home and her

gods. She is the first in the sad series of those, not far from the

kingdom of God,' who needed but a little more resolution at the

critical moment, and, for want of it, shut themselves out from the

covenant, and sank back to a world which they had half renounced.

So these two lonely widows are left, each seeking to sacrifice herself

for the other. Who shall decide which was the more noble and truly

womanly in her self-forgetfulness,--the elder, sadder heart, which

strove to secure for the other some joy and fellowship at the price of

its own deepened solitude; or the younger, which steeled itself against

entreaties, and cast away friends and country for love's sweet sake? We

rightly praise Ruth's vow, but we should not forget Naomi's unselfish

pleading to be left to tread her weary path alone.

Ruth's passionate burst of tenderness is immortal. It has put into

fitting words for all generations the deepest thoughts of loving

hearts, and comes to us over all the centuries between, as warm and

living as when it welled up from that gentle, heroic soul. The two

strongest emotions of our nature are blended in it, and each gives a

portion of its fervour--love and religion. So closely are they

interwoven that it is difficult to allot to each its share in the

united stream; but, without trying to determine to which of them the

greater part of its volume and force is due, and while conscious of the

danger of spoiling such words by comments weaker than themselves, we

may seek to put into distinct form the impressions which they make.

We see in them the heroism of gentleness. Put the sweet figure of the

Moabitess beside the heroes of the Book of Judges, and we feel the

contrast. But is there anything in its pages more truly heroic than her

deed, as she turned her back on the blue hills of Moab, and chose the

joyless lot of the widowed companion of a widow aged and poor, in a

land of strangers, the enemies of her country and its gods? It is

easier far to rush on the spears of the foe, amid the whirl and

excitement of battle, than to choose with open eyes so dreary a

lifelong path. The gentleness of a true woman covers a courage of the

patient, silent sort, which, in its meek steadfastness, is nobler than

the contempt of personal danger, which is vulgarly called bravery. It

is harder to endure than to strike. The supreme type of heroic, as of

all, virtue is Jesus Christ, whose gentleness was the velvet glove on

the iron hand of an inflexible will. Of that best kind of heroes there

are few brighter examples, even in the annals of the Church which

numbers its virgin martyrs by the score, than this sweet figure of

Ruth, as the eager vow comes from her young lips, which had already

tasted sorrow, and were ready to drink its bitterest cup at the call of

duty. She may well teach us to rectify our judgments, and to recognise

the quiet heroism of many a modest life of uncomplaining suffering. Her

example has a special message to women, and exhorts them to see to it

that, in the cultivation of the so-called womanly excellence of

gentleness, they do not let it run into weakness, nor, on the other

hand, aim at strength, to the loss of meekness. The yielding

birch-tree, the lady of the woods,' bends in all its elastic branches

and tossing ringlets of foliage to the wind; but it stands upright

after storms that level oaks and pines. God's strength is gentle

strength, and ours is likest His when it is meek and lowly, like that

of the strong Son of God.'

Ruth's great words may suggest, too, the surrender which is the natural

language of true love. Her story comes in among all these records of

bloodshed and hate, like a bit of calm blue sky among piles of ragged

thunder-clouds, or a breath of fresh air in the oppressive atmosphere

of a slaughter-house. Even in these wild times there was still a quiet

corner where love could spread his wings. The question has often been

asked, what the purpose of the Book of Ruth is, and various answers

have been given. The genealogical table at the end, showing David's

descent from her, the example which it supplies of the reception of a

Gentile into Israel, and other reasons for its presence in Scripture,

have been alleged, and, no doubt, correctly. But the Bible is a very

human book, just because it is a divine one; and surely it would be no

unworthy object to enshrine in its pages a picture of the noble working

of that human love which makes so much of human life. The hallowing of

the family is a distinct purpose of the Old Testament, and the

beautiful example which this narrative gives of the elevating influence

of domestic affection entitles it to a place in the canon. How many

hearts, since Ruth spoke her vow, have found in it the words that

fitted their love best! How often they have been repeated by quivering

lips, and heard as music by loving ears! How solemn, and even awful, is

that perennial freshness of words which came hot and broken by tears,

from lips that have long ago mouldered into dust! What has made them

thus enduring for ever,' is that they express most purely the

self-sacrifice which is essential to all noble love. The very inmost

longing of love is to give itself away to the object beloved. It is not

so much a desire to acquire as to bestow, or, rather, the antithesis of

giving and receiving melts into one action which has a twofold

motion,--one outwards, to give; one inwards, to receive. To love is to

give one's self away, therefore all lesser givings are its food and

delight; and, when Ruth threw herself on Naomi's withered breast, and

sobbed out her passionate resolve, she was speaking the eternal

language of love, and claiming Naomi for her own, in the very act of

giving herself to Naomi, Human love should be the parent of all

self-sacrificing as of all heroic virtues; and in our homes we do not

live in love, as we ought, unless it leads us to the daily exercise of

self-suppression and surrender, which is not felt to be loss but the

natural expression of our love, which it would be a crime against it,

and a pain to ourselves, to withhold. If Ruth's temper lived in our

families, they would be true houses of God' and gates of heaven.'

We hear in Ruth's words also that forsaking of all things which is an

essential of all true religion. We have said that it was difficult to

separate, in the words, the effects of love to Naomi from those of

adoption of Naomi's faith. Apparently Ruth's adhesion to the worship of

Jehovah was originally due to her love for her mother-in-law. It is in

order to be one with her in all things that she says, Thy God shall be

my God.' And it was because Jehovah was Naomi's God that Ruth chose Him

for hers. But whatever the origin of her faith, it was genuine and

robust enough to bear the strain of casting Chemosh and the gods of

Moab behind her, and setting herself with full purpose of heart to seek

the Lord. Abandoning them was digging an impassable gulf between

herself and all her past, with its friendships, loves, and habits. She

is one of the first, and not the least noble, of the long series of

those who suffer the loss of all things, and count them but dung, that

they may win' God for their dearest treasure. We have seen how, in her,

human love wrought self-sacrifice. But it was not human love alone that

did it. The cord that drew her was twisted of two strands, and her love

to Naomi melted into her love of Naomi's God. Blessed they who are

drawn to the knowledge and love of the fountain of all love in heaven

by the sweetness of the characters of His representatives in their

homes, and who feel that they have learned to know God by seeing Him in

dear ones, whose tenderness has revealed His, and whose gracious words

have spoken of His grace! If Ruth teaches us that we must give up all,

in order truly to follow the Lord, the way by which she came to her

religion may teach us how great are the possibilities, and consequently

the duties, of Christians to the members of their own families. If we

had more elder women like Naomi, we should have more younger women like

Ruth.

The self-sacrifice which is possible and blessed, even to inferior

natures, at the bidding of love, is too precious to be squandered on

earthly objects. Men's capacities for it, at the call of dear ones

here, should be the rebuke of their grudging surrender to God. He gave

the capacity that it might find its true field of operation in our

relation to Him. But how much more ready we all are to give up

everything for the sake of our Naomis than for His sake: and how we may

be our own accusers, if the measure of our devotion to them be

contrasted with the measure of our devotion to God!

Finally, we may see, in Ruth's entrance into the religion of Israel, a

picture of what was intended to be the effect of Israel's relation with

the Gentile world.

The household of Elimelech emigrated to Moab in a famine, and, whether

that were right or wrong, they were there among heathens as Jehovah

worshippers. They were meant to be missionaries, and, in Ruth's case,

the purpose was fulfilled. She became the first-fruits of the

Gentiles'; and one aim of the book, no doubt, is to show how the

believing Gentile was to be incorporated into Israel. Boaz rejoices

over her, and especially over her conversion, and prays, A full reward

be given thee of Jehovah, the God of Israel, under whose wings thou art

come to trust.' She is married to him, and becomes the ancestress of

David, and, through him, of the Messiah. All this is a beautiful

completion to the other side of the picture which the fierce fighting

in Judges makes prominent, and teaches that Israel's relation to the

nations around was not to be one of mere antagonism, but that they had

another mission than destruction, and were set in their land, as the

candlestick in the Tabernacle, that light might stream out into the

darkness of the desert. The story of the Moabitess, whose blood flowed

in David's veins, was a standing protest against the later narrow

exclusiveness which called Gentiles dogs,' and prided itself on outward

connection with the nation, in the exact degree in which it lost real

union with the nation's God, and real understanding of the nation's

mission.

We have left ourselves no space to speak of the remainder of this

passage, which is of less importance. It gives us a lively picture of

the stir in the little town of Bethlehem, as the two way-worn women

came into it, in their strange attire, and attracting notice by

travelling alone. As we have observed, they said,' in verse 19, is

feminine. The women of the village buzzed round the strangers, as they

sat in silence, perhaps by that well at the gate, of which, long after,

David longed to drink. Wonder, curiosity, and possibly a spice of

malice, mingle in the question, Is this Naomi?' It is heartless, at any

rate; it had been better to have found them food and shelter than to

have let them sit, the mark for sharp tongues. Naomi's bitter words

seem to be moved partly by a sense of the coldness of the reception.

She realises that she has indeed come back to a changed world, where

there will be little sympathy except such as Ruth can give. It is with

almost passion that she abjures her name Pleasant,' as a satire on her

woful lot, and bids them call her Bitter,' as truer to fact now. The

burst of sorrow is natural, as she finds herself again where she had

been a wife and mother, and remembers happier things.' Her faith

wavers, and her words almost reproach God. The exaggerations in which

memory is apt to indulge colour them. I went out full.' She has

forgotten that they went out' to seek for bread. She only remembers

that four went away, and three sleep in Moab. Possibly she thinks of

their emigration as a sin, and traces her dear ones' deaths to God's

displeasure on its account. His testifying' against her probably means

that His providence in bereaving her witnessed to His disapprobation.

But, whether that be so or not, her wild words are not those of a

patient sufferer, who bows to His will. But true faith may sometimes

break down, and Ruth's trusting under the wings of Jehovah' is proof

enough that, in the long years of lonely sorrow, Naomi's example had

shown how peaceful and safe was the shelter there.

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THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL

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THE CHILD PROPHET

And the child Samuel ministered unto the Lord before Eli. And the word

of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision. 2.

And it came to pass at that time, when Eli was laid down in his place,

and his eyes began to wax dim, that he could not see; 8. And ere the

lamp of God went out in the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God

was, and Samuel was laid down to sleep; 4. That the Lord called Samuel:

and he answered, Here am I. 5. And he ran onto Eli, and said, Here am

I; for thou calledst me. And he said, I called not; lie down again. And

he went and lay down. 6. And the Lord called yet again, Samuel. And

Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call

me. And he answered, I called not, my son; lie down again. 7. Now

Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet

revealed unto him. 8. And the Lord called Samuel again the third time.

And he arose and went to Eli, and said, Here am I; for thou didst call

me. And Eli perceived that the Lord had called the child. 9. Therefore

Eli said unto Samuel, Go, lie down: and it shall be, if He call thee,

that thou shalt say, Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth. So Samuel

went and lay down in his place. 10. And the Lord came, and stood, and

called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak;

for Thy servant heareth. 11. And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I

will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that

heareth it shall tingle. 12. In that day I will perform against Eli all

things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will

also make an end. 13. For I have told him that I will judge his house

for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made

themselves vile, and he restrained them not. 14. And therefore I have

sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not

be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever.'--1 SAMUEL iii. 1-14.

The opening words of this passage are substantially repeated from 1

Samuel ii. 11, 18. They come as a kind of refrain, contrasting the

quiet, continuous growth and holy service of the child Samuel with the

black narrative of Eli's riotous sons. While the hereditary priests

were plunging into debauchery, and making men turn away from the

Tabernacle services, Hannah's son was ministering unto the Lord, and,

though no priest, was girt with an ephod.' This white flower blossomed

on a dunghill. The continuous growth of a character, from a child

serving God, and to old age walking in the same path, is the great

lesson which the story of Samuel teaches us. The child is father of the

man,' and all his long days are bound each to each' by true religion.

There are two types of experience among God's greatest servants. Paul,

made an Apostle from a persecutor, heads the one class. Timothy in the

New Testament and Samuel in the Old, represent the other. An Augustine

or a Bunyan is made the more earnest, humble, and whole-hearted by the

remembrance of a wasted youth and of God's arresting mercy. But there

are a serenity and continuity about a life which has grown up in the

fear of God that have their own charm and blessing. It is well to have

much transgression' forgiven, but it may be better to have always been

innocent' and ignorant of it. Pardon cleanses sin, and even turns the

memory of it into an ally of holiness; but traces are left on

character, and, at the best, years have been squandered which do not

return. Samuel is the pattern of child religion and service, to which

teachers should aim that their children may be conformed. How

beautifully his double obedience is expressed in the simple words! His

service was unto the Lord,' and it was before Eli'; that is to say, he

learned his work from the old man, and in obeying him he served God.

The child's religion is largely obedience to human guides, and he

serves God best by doing what he is bid,--a lesson needed in our days

by both parents and children.

Samuel's peaceful service is contrasted, in the second half of the

first verse, with the sad cessation of divine revelations in that

dreary time of national laxity. A demoralised priesthood, an alienated

people, a silent God,--these are the outstanding features of the period

when this fair life of continuous worship unfolded itself. This flower

grew in a desert. The voice of God had become a tradition of the past,

not an experience of the present. Rare' conveys the idea better than

precious.' The intention is not to tell the estimate in which the word

was held, but the infrequency of its utterance, as appears from the

following parallel clause. The fact is mentioned in order to complete

the picture of Samuel's environment' to fling into relief against that

background his service, and to prepare the way for the narrative of the

beginning of an epoch of divine speech. When priests are faithless and

people careless, God's voice will often sound from lowly childlike

lips. The man who is to be His instrument in carrying on His work will

often come from the very centre of the old order, into which he is to

breathe new life, and on which he is to impress a new stamp.

The artless description of the night in the Tabernacle is broken by the

more general notice of Eli's dim sight, which the Revised Version

rightly throws into a parenthesis. It is somewhat marred, too, by the

transposition which the Authorised Version, following some more ancient

ones, has made, in order to avoid saying, as the Hebrew plainly does,

that Samuel slept in the Temple of the Lord, where the ark was.' The

picture is much more vivid and tender, if we conceive of the dim-eyed

old man, lying somewhat apart; of the glimmering light, nearly extinct

but still faintly burning; and of the child laid to sleep in the

Tabernacle. Surely the picturesque contrast between the sanctity of the

ark and the innocent sleep of childhood is meant to strike us, and to

serve as connecting the place with the subsequent revelation. Childlike

hearts, which thus quietly rest in the secret place of the Most High,'

and day and night are near His ark, will not fail of hearing His voice.

He sleeps secure who sleeps beneath the shadow of the Almighty.' May

not these particulars, too, be meant to have some symbolic

significance? Night hung over the nation. The spiritual eye of the

priest was dim, and the order seemed growing old and decrepit, but the

lamp of God had not altogether gone out; and if Eli was growing blind,

Samuel was full of fresh young life. The darkest hour is that before

the dawn; and that silent sanctuary, with the slumbering old half-blind

priest and the expiring lamp, may stand for an emblem of the state of

Israel.

The thrice-repeated and misunderstood call may yield lessons of value.

We note the familiar form of the call. There is no vision, no symbol of

the divine glory, such as other prophets had, but an articulate voice,

so human-like that it is thought to be Eli's. Such a kind of call

fitted the child's stature best. We note the swift, cheery obedience to

what he supposes to be Eli's voice. He sprang up at once, and ran to

Eli,'--a pretty picture of cheerful service, grudging not his broken

sleep, which, no doubt, had often been similarly broken by similar

calls. Perhaps it was in order to wait on Eli, quite as much as to tend

the lamp or open the gates, that the singular arrangement was made of

his sleeping in the Temple; and the reason for the previous parenthesis

about Eli's blindness may have been to explain why Samuel slept near

him. Where were Eli's sons? They should have been their father's

attendants, and the watchers by night . . . in the house of the Lord';

but they were away rioting, and the care of both Temple and priest was

left to a child.

The old man's heart evidently went out to the boy. How tenderly he bids

him lie down again! How affectionately he calls him my son,' as if he

was already beginning to feel that this was his true successor, and not

the blackguards that were breaking his heart! The two were a pair of

friends: on the one side were sedulous care and swift obedience by

night and by day; on the other were affection and a discernment of

coming greatness, made the clearer by the bitter contrast with his own

children's lives. The old and the young are good companions for one

another, and often understand each other better and help each other

more than either does his contemporaries.

Samuel mistook God's voice for Eli's, as we all often do. And not less

often we make the converse blunder, and mistake Eli's voice for God's.

It needs a very attentive ear, and a heart purged from selfishness and

self-will, and ready for obedience, to know when God speaks, though men

may be His mouthpieces, and when men speak, though they may call

themselves His messengers. The child's mistake was venial. It is less

pardonable and more dangerous when repeated by us. If we would be

guarded against it, we must be continually where Samuel was, and we

must not sleep in the Temple, but watch and be sober.'

Eli's perception that it was God who spoke must have had a pang in it.

It is not easy for the old to recognise that the young hear God's voice

more clearly than they, nor for the superior to be glad when he is

passed over and new truth dawns on the inferior. But, if there were any

such feeling, it is silenced with beautiful self-abnegation, and he

tells the wondering child the meaning of the voice and the answer he

must make. What higher service can any man do to his fellows, old or

young, than to help them to discern God's call and to obey it? What

nobler conception of a teacher's work is there than that? Eli heard no

voice, from which we may probably conclude that, however real the

voice, it was not audible to sense; but he taught Samuel to interpret

and answer the voice which he heard, and thus won some share of a

prophet's reward.

With what expectation in his young heart Samuel lay down again in his

place! This time there is an advance in the form of the call, for only

now do we read that the Lord came, and stood, and called' as before. A

manifestation, addressed to the inward eye, accompanied that to the

ear. There is no attempt at describing, nor at softening down, the

frank anthropomorphism' of the representation, which is the less likely

to mislead the more complete it is. Samuel had heard Him before; he

sees Him now, and mistake is impossible. But there is no terror nor

recoil from the presence. The child's simplicity saves from that, and

the child's purity; for his little life had been a growing in service

and in favour with God and man.'

The answer that came from the child's lips meant far more than the

child knew. It is the answer which we are all bound to make. Let us see

how deep and wide its scope is. It expresses the entire surrender of

the will to the will of God. That is the secret of all peace and

nobleness. There is nothing happy or great for man in this world but to

love and do God's will. All else is nought. This is solid. The world

passeth away, . . . but he that doeth the will of God abideth for

ever.' Everything besides is show and delusion, and a life directed to

it is fleeting as the cloud-wrack that sweeps across the sky, and,

whether it is shone on or is black, is equally melting away. Happy the

child who begins with such surrender of self to be God's instrument,

and who, like Samuel, can stand up at the end and challenge men's

judgment on his course!

The answer vows prompt obedience to yet undisclosed duty. God ever

calls His servants to tasks which only by degrees are made known. So

Paul in his conversion was bid to go into Damascus, and there learn

what more he was to do. We must first put ourselves in God's hands, and

then He will lead us round the turn in the road, and show us our work.

We get it set for us bit by bit, but the surrender must be entire. The

details of His will are revealed as we need them for the moment's

guidance. Let us accept them in bulk, and stand to the acceptance in

each single case! That is no obedience at all which says, Tell me first

what you are going to bid me do, and then I will see whether I will do

it.' The true spirit of filial submission says, I delight to do Thy

will; now show me what it is.' It was a strange, long road on which

Samuel put his foot when he answered this call, and he little knew

where it was to lead him. But the blessing of submission is that we do

not need to know. It is enough to see where to put our lifted foot.

What comes next we can let God settle.

The answer supplicated further light because of present obedience.

Speak! for Thy servant heareth,' is a plea never urged in vain. The

servant's open ear is a reason for the Lord's open lips. We may be

quite sure that, if we are willing to hear, He is more than willing to

speak; and anything is possible rather than that His children shall be

left, like ill-commanded soldiers on a battlefield, waiting for orders

which never come. If any man willeth to do His will, he shall know.'

The sad prophecy which is committed to such apparently incongruous lips

reiterates a former message by a man of God.' Eli was a kindly, and, in

his way, good man, but wanting in firmness, and acquiescent in evil,

partly, perhaps, from lack of moral courage and partly from lack of

fervent religion. He is not charged with faults in his own

administration of his office, but with not curbing his disreputable

sons. The threatenings are directed, not against himself, but against

his house,' who are to be removed from the high priestly office.

Nothing less than a revolution is foretold. The deposition of Eli's

family would shake the whole framework of society. It is to be utterly

destroyed, and no sacrifice nor offering can purge it. The ulcer must

have eaten deep which required such stern measures for its excision.

The sin was mainly the sons'; but the guilt was largely the father's.

We may learn how cruel paternal laxity is, and how fatal mischief may

be done, by neglect of the plain duty of restraining children. He who

tolerates evil which it is his province to suppress, is an accomplice,

and the blood of the doers is red on his hands.

It was a terrible message to give to a child; but Samuel's calling was

to be the guide of Israel in a period of transition, and he had to be

broken early into the work, which needed severity as well as

tenderness. Perhaps, too, the stern message was somewhat softened, for

the poor old man, by the lips through which it came to him. All that

reverent love could do, we may be sure, the young prophet would do, to

lighten the heavy tidings. Secrecy would be secured, too; for Samuel,

who was so unwilling to tell even Eli what the Lord had said, would

tell none besides.

God calls each child in our homes as truly as He did Samuel. From each

the same obedience is asked. Each may, like the boy in the Tabernacle,

grow up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord,' and so escape the

many scars and sorrows of a life wrongly begun. Let parents see to it

that they think rightly of their work, and do not content themselves

with conveying information, but aim at nothing short of helping all

their children to hear and lovingly to yield to the gentle call of the

incarnate God!

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FAITHLESSNESS AND DEFEAT

And the word of Samuel came to all Israel. Now Israel went out against

the Philistines to battle, and pitched beside Eben-ezer: and the

Philistines pitched in Aphek. 2. And the Philistines put themselves in

array against Israel: and when they joined battle, Israel was smitten

before the Philistines: and they slew of the army in the field about

four thousand men. 3. And when the people were come into the camp, the

elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us today before

the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out

of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of

the hand of our enemies. 4. So the people sent to Shiloh, that they

might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts,

which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni

and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. 5. And

when the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel

shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6. And when

the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth

the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they

understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp. 7. And the

Philistines were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp. And

they said, Woe unto us! for there hath not been such a thing

heretofore. 8. Woe unto us! who shall deliver us out of the hand of

these mighty gods? these are the gods that smote the Egyptians with all

the plagues in the wilderness. 9. Be strong, and quit yourselves like

men, O ye Philistines, that ye be not servants unto the Hebrews, as

they have been to you: quit yourselves like men, and fight. 10. And the

Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man

into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of

Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11. And the ark of God was taken; and

the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain. 12. And there ran

a man of Benjamin out of the army, and came to Shiloh the same day with

his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head. 13. And when he came,

lo, Eli sat upon a seat by the wayside watching: for his heart trembled

for the ark of God. And when the man came into the city, and told it,

all the city cried out. 14. And when Eli heard the noise of the crying,

he said, What meaneth the noise of this tumult? And the man came in

hastily, and told Eli. 15. Now Eli was ninety and eight years old; and

his eyes were dim, that he could not see. 16. And the man said unto

Eli, I am he that came out of the army, and I fled to-day out of the

army. And he said, What is there done, my son? 17. And the messenger

answered and said, Israel is fled before the Philistines, and there

hath been also a great slaughter among the people, and thy two sons

also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God Is taken. 18.

And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he

fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck

brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged

Israel forty years.'--1 SAMUEL iv. 1-18.

The first words of verse 1 are closely connected with the end of

chapter iii., and complete the account of Samuel's inauguration. The

word of the Lord' came to Samuel, and the word of Samuel came to all

Israel.' The one clause tells of the prophet's inspiration, the other

of his message and its reception by the nation. This bond of union

between the clauses has been broken by the chapter division, apparently

for the sake of representing the revolt against the Philistines as due

to Samuel's instigation. But its being so is very doubtful. If God had

sent the army into the field, He would have prepared it, by penitent

return to Him, for victory, as no defeat follows on war which He

commands. Probably Samuel's mission made an unwholesome ferment in

minds which were quite untouched by its highest significance, and so

led to a precipitate rebellion, preceded by no religious reformation,

and therefore sure to fail. It was twenty years too soon (1 Sam. vii.

3). Samuel took no part in the struggle, and his name is never

mentioned till, at the end of that period, he emphatically condemns all

that had been done, and points the true path of deliverance, in return

to the Lord with all your heart.' So the great lesson of this story is

that when Israel fights Philistines, unbidden and unrepentant, it is

sure to be beaten,--a truth with manifold wide applications.

The first disastrous defeat took place on a field, which was afterwards

made memorable by a great victory, and by a name which lives still as a

watchword for hope and gratitude. Happy they who at last conquer where

they once failed, and in the retrospect can say, Hitherto the Lord

helped,' both by defeat and by the victory for which defeat prepared a

way! That opening struggle, bloody and grave as it was, was not

decisive; for the Israelites regained their fortified camp unmolested,

and held together, and kept their communications open, as appears from

what followed.

Verses 3 to 5 give us a glimpse into the camp of Israel, and verses 6

to 9 into that of the Philistines. These two companion pictures are

worth looking at. The two armies are very much alike, and we may say

that the purpose of the picture is to show how Israel was practically

heathen, taking just the same views of its relation to God which the

Philistines did. Note, too, the absence of central authority. The

elders' hold a kind of council. Where were Eli the judge and Samuel the

prophet? Neither had part in this war. The question of the elders was

right, inasmuch as it recognised that the Lord had smitten them, but

wrong inasmuch as it betrayed that they had not the faintest notion

that the reason was their own moral and religious apostasy. They had

not learned the A B C of their history, and of the conditions of

national prosperity. They stand precisely on the Pagan level, believing

in a national God, who ought to help his votaries, but from some

inexplicable caprice does not; or who, perhaps, is angry at the

omission of some ritual observance. What an answer they would have got

if Samuel had been there! There ought to have been no need for the

question, or, rather, there was need for it, and the answer ought to

have been clear to them; their sin was the all-sufficient reason for

their defeat. There are plenty of Christians, like these elders, who,

when they find themselves beaten by the world and the devil, puzzle

their brains to invent all sorts of reasons for God's smiting, except

the true one,--their own departure from Him.

The remedy suggested by the united wisdom of the leaders was as heathen

as the consultation which resulted in it. Let us send for the ark'

Those who regarded not the God of the ark,' says Bishop Hall, think

themselves safe and happy in the ark of God.' They thought, with that

confusion between symbol and reality which runs through all heathen

worship, and makes the danger of images,' whether in heathenism or in

sensuous Christianity, that if they brought the ark, they brought God

with it. It was a kind of charm, which would help them, they hardly

knew how. Its very name might have taught them better. They call it the

ark of the covenant of the Lord'; and a covenant has two parties to it,

and promises favour on conditions. If they had kept the conditions,

these four thousand corpses would not have been lying stiff and stark

outside the rude encampment. As they did not keep them, bringing the

chest which contained the transcript of them into their midst was

bringing a witness of their apostasy, not a helper of their feebleness.

Repentance would have brought God. Dragging the ark thither only

removed Him farther away. We need not be too hard upon these people;

for the natural disposition of us all is to trust to the externals of

worship, and to put a punctilious attention to these in the place of a

true cleaving of heart to the God who dwells near us, and is in us and

on our side, if we cling to Him with penitent love. Even God-appointed

symbols become snares. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are treated by

multitudes as these elders did the ark. The fewer and simpler the

outward observances of worship are, the less danger is there of the

poor sense-bound soul tarrying in them, instead of passing by means of

them into the higher, purer air beyond.

What right had these presumptuous elders to bring the ark from Shiloh?

Eli was its guardian; and he, as appears probable from his anxiety

about its fate, did not approve of its removal. But the people' took

the law into their own hands. There seems some hint that their action

was presumptuous profanation, in the solemn, full title given in verse

4: The ark of the covenant of the Lord of Hosts which dwelleth between

the cherubim,'--as if contrasting His awful majesty, His universal

dominion over the armies of heaven and the embattled powers of the

universe, and the dazzling light of that glory,' which shone in the

innermost chamber of the Tabernacle, with the unanointed hands that

presumed to press in thither and drag so sacred a thing into the light

of common day and the tumult of the camp. Nor is the profanation

lessened, but rather increased, by the priestly attendants, Eli's two

sons, themselves amongst the worst men in Israel. When Hophni and

Phinehas are its priests, the ark can bring no help. Heathenism

separates religion from morality altogether. In it there is no

connection between worship and purity, and the Old Testament religion

for the first time welded these two inseparably together. That

tumultuous procession from Shiloh, with these two profligates for the

priests of God, and the bearers thinking that they were sure of their

God's favour now, whatever their sin, shows how completely Israel had

forgotten its own law, and, whilst professedly worshipping Jehovah, had

really become a heathen people. The reception of the ark with that

fierce shout, which echoed among the hills and was heard in the

Philistines' encampment, shows the same thing. Not so should the ark

have been received, but with tears and confessions and silent awe. No

man in all that host had ever looked upon it before. No man ought to

have seen it then. Once a year, and not without blood sprinkled on its

cover, the high priest might look on it through the cloud of incense

which kept him from death, while all the people waited hushed till he

came forth, but now it is dragged into the camp, and welcomed with a

yell of mad delight, as a pledge of victory. What could display more

strikingly the practical heathenism of the people?

Verses 6 to 9 take us into the other camp, and show us the undisguised

heathens. The Philistines think just as the other side did, only, in

their polytheistic way, they do not use the name Jehovah,' but speak

first of God' and then of gods' as having arrived in the camp. The

nations dreaded each other's gods, though they worshipped their own;

and the Philistines believed quite as much that Jehovah' was the

Hebrew's God, as that Dagon' was theirs. There was to be a duel then

between the two superhuman powers. The vague reports which they had

heard of the Exodus, nearly five hundred years ago, filled the

Philistines with panic. They had but a confused notion of the facts of

that old story, and thought that Egypt had met the ten plagues in the

wilderness.' The blunder is very characteristic, and helps to show the

accuracy of our narrative. It would not have occurred to a

legend-maker. It sounds strange to us that the Philistines' belief that

the Hebrews' God had come to their help should issue in exhortations to

fight like men.' But polytheism makes that quite a natural conclusion;

and there is something almost fine in the truculent boldness with which

they set their teeth for a fierce struggle. They reiterate to one

another the charge to quit themselves like men'; and while they do not

hide from themselves that the question whether they are to be still

masters is hanging on the coming struggle, a dash of contempt for the

Hebrews' who had been their slaves' is perceptible.

According to verse 10, the Philistines appear to have begun the attack,

perhaps taking the enemy by surprise. The rout this time was complete.

The grim catalogue of disaster in verses 10 and 11 is strangely tragic

in its dreadful, monotonous plainness, each clause adding something to

the terrible story, and each linked to the preceding by a simple and.'

The Israelites seem to have been scattered. They fled, every man to his

tent.' The army, with little cohesion and no strong leaders, melted

away. The ark was captured, and its two unworthy attendants slain.

Bringing it had not brought God, then. It was but a chest of

shittimwood, with two slabs of lettered stone in it,--and what help was

in that? But its capture was the sign that the covenant with Israel was

for the time annulled. The whole framework of the nation was

disorganised. The keystone was struck out of their worship, and they

had fallen, by their own sin, to the level of the nations, and even

below these; for they had their gods, but Israel had turned away from

their God, and He had departed from them. Superstition fancied that the

presence of the ark secured to impenitent men the favour of God; but it

was no superstition which saw in its absence from Shiloh His averted

face.

Is there in poetry or drama a more vivid and pathetic passage than the

closing verses of this narrative, which tell of the panting messenger

and the old blind Eli?

Eben-ezer' cannot have been very far from Shiloh, for the fugitive had

seen the end of the fight, and reached the city before night. He came

with the signs of mourning, and, as it would appear from verse 13,

passed the old man at the gate without pausing, and burst into the city

with his heavy tidings. One can almost hear the shrill shrieks of wrath

and despair which first told Eli that something was wrong. Blind and

unwieldy and heavy-hearted, he sat by the gate to which the news would

first come; but yet he is the last to hear,--perhaps because all shrank

from telling him, perhaps because in the confusion no one remembered

him. Only after he had asked the meaning of the tumult, of which his

foreboding heart and conscience told him the meaning before it was

spoken, is the messenger brought to the man to whom he should have gone

first. How touchingly the story pauses, even at this crisis, to paint

the poor old man! A stronger word is used to describe his blindness

than in 1 Samuel iii. 2, as the Revised Version shows. His fixed

eyeballs were sightless now; and there he sat, dreading and longing to

hear. The fugitive's account of himself is shameless in its avowal of

his cowardice, and prepares Eli for the worst. But note how he speaks

gently and with a certain dignity, crushing down his anxiety,--How went

the matter, my son?' Then, with no merciful circumlocution or veiling,

out comes the whole dismal story once again.

Eli spoke no more. His sons' death had been the sign given him years

before that the threatenings against his house should be fulfilled; but

even that blow he can bear. But the capture of the ark is more than a

personal sorrow, and his start of horror overbalances him, and he falls

from his seat (which probably had no back to it), and dies, silent, of

a broken neck and a broken heart. His forty years of judgeship ended

thus. He was in many respects good and lovable, gentle, courteous,

devout. His kindly treatment of Hannah, his fatherly training of

Samuel, his submission to the divine message through the child, his

trembling for the ark,' his death at the news of its being taken, all

indicate a character of real sweetness and true godliness. But all was

marred by a fatal lack of strong, stern resolve to tolerate no evil

which he ought to suppress. Good, weak men, especially when they let

foolish tenderness hinder righteous severity, bring terrible evils on

themselves, their families, and their nation. It was Eli who, at

bottom, was the cause of the defeat and the disasters which slew his

sons and broke his own heart. Nothing is more cruel than the weak

indulgence which, when men are bringing a curse on themselves by their

sin, restrains them not.'

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REPENTANCE AND VICTORY

And the men of Kirjath-jearim came, and fetched up the ark of the Lord,

and brought it into the house of Abinadab in the hill, and sanctified

Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the Lord. 2. And it came to pans,

while the ark abode in Kirjath-jearim, that the time was long; for it

was twenty years: and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

3. And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do

return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange

gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the

Lord, and serve Him only: and He will deliver you out of the hand of

the Philistines. 4. Then the children of Israel did put away Baalim and

Ashtaroth, and served the Lord only. 5. And Samuel said, Gather all

Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord. 6. And they

gathered together to Mizpeh, and drew water, and poured it out before

the Lord, and fasted on that day, and said there, We have sinned

against the Lord. And Samuel judged the children of Israel in Mizpeh.

7. And when the Philistines heard that the children of Israel were

gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up

against Israel. And when the children of Israel heard it, they were

afraid of the Philistines. 8. And the children of Israel said to

Samuel, Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us, that He will

save us out of the hand of the Philistines. 9. And Samuel took a

sucking lamb, and offered it for a burnt-offering wholly unto the Lord:

and Samuel cried unto the Lord for Israel; and the Lord heard him. 10.

And as Samuel was offering up the burnt-offering, the Philistines drew

near to battle against Israel: but the Lord thundered with a great

thunder on that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them: and

they were smitten before Israel. 11. And the men of Israel went out of

Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came

under Beth-car. 12. Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh

and Shen, and called the name of it Eben-ezer, saying, Hitherto hath

the Lord helped us.'--1 SAMUEL vii. 1-12.

The ark had spread disaster in Philistia and Beth-shemesh, and the

willingness of the men of Kirjath-jearim to receive it was a token of

their devotion. They must have been in some measure free from idolatry

and penetrated with reverence. The name of the city (City of the Woods,

like our Woodville) suggests the situation of the little town, bosomed

high in tufted trees,' where the ark lay for so long, apparently

without sacrifices, and simply watched over by Eleazar, who was

probably of the house of Aaron. Eli's family was exterminated; Shiloh

seems to have been destroyed, or, at all events, forsaken; and for

twenty years internal disorganisation and foreign oppression, relieved

only by Samuel's growing influence, prevailed. But during these dark

days a better mind was slowly appearing among the people. All . . .

Israel lamented after the Lord.' Lost blessings are precious. God was

more prized when withdrawn. Happy they to whom darkness brightens that

Light which brightens all darkness! Our text gives us three main

points,--the preparation for victory in repentance and return (verses

3-9); the victory (verses 10, 11); the thankful commemoration of

victory (verse 12).

I. We have first the preparation for victory in repentance and return.

At the time of the first fight at Eben-ezer, Israel was full of

idolatry and immorality. Then their preparation for battle was the mere

bringing the ark into the camp, as if it were a fetish or magic charm.

That was pure heathenism, and they were idolaters in such worship of

Jehovah, just as much as if they had been bowing to Baal. Many of us

rely on our baptism or on churchgoing precisely in the same spirit, and

are as truly pagans. Not the name of the Deity, but the spirit of the

worshipper, makes the idolater.'

How different this second preparation! Samuel, who had never been named

in the narrative of defeat, now reappears as the acknowledged prophet

and, in a sense, dictator. The first requirement is to come back to the

Lord with the whole heart,' and that return is to be practically

exhibited in the complete forsaking of Baal and the Ashtoreths. Ye

cannot serve God and mammon.' It must be Him only,' if it is Him at

all. Real religion is exclusive, as real love is. In its very nature it

is indivisible, and if given to two is accepted by neither. So there

was some kind of general and perhaps public giving up of the idols, and

some, though probably not the fully appointed, public service of

Jehovah. If we are to have His strength infused for victory, we must

cast away our idols, and come back to Him with all our hearts. The

hands that would clasp Him, and be upheld by the clasp, must be emptied

of trifles. To yield ourselves wholly to God is the secret of strength.

The next step was a solemn national assembly at Samuel's town of

Mizpeh, situated on a conspicuous hill, north-west of Jerusalem, which

still is called the prophet Samuel.' Sacrifices were offered, which are

no part of the Mosaic ritual. A significant part of these consisted in

the pouring out of water before the Lord,' probably as emblematic of

the pouring out of soul in penitence; for it was accompanied by fasting

and confession of sin. The surest way to the true victory, which is the

conquest of our sins, is confessing them to God. When once we have seen

any sin in its true character clearly enough to speak to Him about it,

we have gone far to emancipate ourselves from it, and have quickened

our consciences towards more complete intolerance of its hideousness.

Confession breaks the entail of sin, and substitutes for the dreary

expectation of its continuance the glad conviction of forgiveness and

cleansing. It does not make a stiff fight unnecessary; for assured

freedom from sin is not the easy prize of confession, but the hard-won

issue of sturdy effort in God's strength. But it is like blowing the

trumpet of revolt,--it gives the signal for, and itself begins, the

conflict. The night before the battle should be spent, not in feasting,

but in prayer and lowly shriving of our souls before the great

Confessor.

The watchful Philistines seem to have had their attention attracted by

the unusual stir among their turbulent subjects, and especially by this

suspicious gathering at Mizpeh, and they come suddenly up the passes

from their low-lying territory to disperse it. A whiff of the old

terror blows across the spirits of the people, not unwholesomely; for

it sets them, not to desire the outward presence of the ark, not to run

from their post, but to beseech Samuel's intercession. They are afraid,

but they mean to fight all the same, and, because they are afraid, they

long for God's help. That is the right temper, which, if a man cherish,

he will not be defeated, however many Philistines rush at him. Twenty

years of slavery had naturally bred fear in them, but it is a wise fear

which breeds reliance on God. Our enemy is strong, and no fault is more

fatal than an underestimate of his power. If we go into battle singing,

we shall probably come out of it weeping, or never come out at all. If

we begin bragging, we shall end bleeding. It is only he who looks on

the advancing foe, and feels They are too strong for me,' who will have

to say, as he watches them retreating, He delivered me from my strong

enemy.' We should think much of our foes and little of ourselves. Such

a temper will lead to caution, watchfulness, wise suspicion, vigorous

strain of all our little power, and, above all, it will send us to our

knees to plead with our great Captain and Advocate.

Samuel acts as priest and intercessor, offering a burnt-offering,

which, like the pouring out of water, is no part of the Mosaic

sacrifices. The fact is plain, but it is neither unaccountable nor

large enough to warrant the sweeping inferences which have been drawn

from it and its like, as to the non-existence at this period of the

developed ceremonial in Leviticus. We need only remember Samuel's

special office, and the seclusion in which the ark lay, to have a

sufficient explanation of the cessation of the appointed worship and

the substitution of such irregular' sacrifices. We are on surer ground

when we see here the incident to which Psalm xcix. 6 refers (Samuel

among them that call upon His name. They called upon the Lord, and He

answered them'), and when we learn the lesson that there is a power in

intercession which we can use for one another, and which reaches its

perfection in the prevailing prayer of our great High-priest, who, like

Samuel and Moses, is on the mountain praying, while we fight in the

plain.

II. We have next the victory on the field of the former defeat. The

battle is joined on the old ground. Strategic considerations probably

determined the choice as they did in the case of the many battles on

the plain of Esdraelon, for instance, or on the fields of the

Netherlands. Probably the armies met on some piece of level ground in

one of the wadies, up which the Philistines marched to the attack. At

all events, there they were, face to face once more on the old spot. On

both sides might be men who had been in the former engagement.

Depressing remembrances or burning eagerness to wipe out the shame

would stir in those on the one side; contemptuous remembrance of the

ease with which the last victory had been won would animate the other.

God Himself helped them by the thunderstorm, the solemn roll of which

was the voice of the Lord' answering Samuel's prayer. The ark had

brought only defeat to the impure host; the sacrifice brings victory to

the penitent army. Observe that the defeat is accomplished before the

men of Israel went out of Mizpeh.' God scattered the enemy, and Israel

had only to pursue flying foes, as they hurried in wild confusion down

the pass, with the lightning flashing behind them. The same pregnant

expression is used for the rout of the Philistines as for the previous

one of Israel. They were smitten before,' not by, the victors. The true

victor was God.

The story gives boundless hope of victory, even on the fields of our

former defeats. We can master rooted faults of character, and overcome

temptations which have often conquered us. Let no man say: Ah! I have

been beaten so often that I may as well give up the fight altogether.

Years and years I have been a slave, and everywhere I tread on old

battlefields, where I have come off second-best. It will never be

different. I may as well cease struggling.' However obstinate the

fault, however often it has re-established its dominion and dragged us

back to slavery, when we thought that we had made good our escape,--

that is no reason to bate one jot of heart or hope.' We have every

reason to hope bravely and boundlessly in the possibility of victory.

True, we should rightly despair if we had only our own powers to depend

on. But the grounds of our confidence lie in the inexhaustible fulness

of God's Spirit, and the certain purpose of His will that we should be

purified from all iniquity, as well as in the proved tendency of the

principles and motives of the gospel to produce characters of perfect

goodness, and, above all, in the sacrifice and intercession of our

Captain on high. Since we have Christ to dwell in us, and be the seed

of a new life, which will unfold into the likeness of that life from

which it has sprung; since we have a perfect Example in Him who became

like us in lowliness of flesh, that we might become like Him in purity

of spirit; since we have a gospel which enjoins and supplies the

mightiest motives for complete obedience; and since the most rooted and

inveterate evils are no part of ourselves, but vipers' which may be

shaken from the hand' into which they have struck their fangs, we

commit faithless treason against God, His message, and ourselves, when

we doubt that we shall overcome all our sins. We should not, then, go

into the fight downhearted, with our banners drooping, as if defeat sat

on them. The belief that we shall conquer has much to do with victory.

That is true in all sorts of conflicts. So, though the whole field may

be strewed with relics, eloquent of former disgrace, we may renew the

struggle with confidence that the future will not always copy the past.

We are saved by hope'; by hope we are made strong. It is the very

helmet on our heads. The warfare with our own evils should be waged in

the assurance that every field of our defeat shall one day see set up

on it the trophy of, not our victory, but God's in us.

III. We have here the grateful commemoration of victory. Where that

gray stone stands no man knows to-day, but its name lives for ever.

This trophy bore no vaunts of leader's skill or soldier's bravery. One

name only is associated with it. It is the stone of help,' and its

message to succeeding generations is: Hitherto hath the Lord helped

us.' That Hitherto' is the word of a mighty faith. It includes as parts

of one whole the disaster no less than the victory. The Lord was

helping Israel no less by sorrow and oppression than by joy and

deliverance. The defeat which guided them back to Him was tender

kindness and precious help. He helps us by griefs and losses, by

disappointments and defeats; for whatever brings us closer to Him, and

makes us feel that all our bliss and wellbeing lie in knowing and

loving Him, is helpful beyond all other aid, and strength-giving above

all other gifts.

Such remembrance has in it a half-uttered prayer and hope for the

future. Hitherto' means more than it says. It looks forward as well as

backward, and sees the future in the past. Memory passes into hope, and

the radiance in the sky behind throws light on to our forward path.

God's hitherto' carries henceforward' wrapped up in it. His past

reveals the eternal principles which will mould His future acts. He has

helped, therefore he will help, is no good argument concerning men; but

it is valid concerning God.

The devout man's gratitude' is, and ought to be, a lively sense of

favours to come.' We should never doubt but that, as good John Newton

puts it, in words which bid fair to last longer than Samuel's gray

stone:--

Each sweet Ebenezer I have in review

Confirms His good pleasure to help me quite through.'

We may write that on every field of our life's conflicts, and have it

engraved at last on our gravestones, where we rest in hope.

The best use of memory is to mark more plainly than it could be seen at

the moment the divine help which has filled our lives. Like some track

on a mountain side, it is less discernible to us, when treading it,

than when we look at it from the other side of the glen. Many parts of

our lives, that seemed unmarked by any consciousness of God's help

while they were present, flash up into clearness when seen through the

revealing light of memory, and gleam purple in it, while they looked

but bare rocks as long as we were stumbling among them. It is blessed

to remember, and to see everywhere God's help. We do not remember

aright unless we do. The stone that commemorates our lives should bear

no name but one, and this should be all that is read upon it: Now unto

Him that kept us from falling, unto Him be glory!'

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MAKE US A KING'

Then all the elders of Israel gathered themselves together, and came to

Samuel, onto Ramah, 5. And said unto him, Behold, thou art old, and thy

sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the

nations. 6. But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a

king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Lord. 7. And the Lord said

unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say

unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me,

that I should not reign over them. 8. According to all the works which

they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even

unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me, and served other gods,

so do they also unto thee. 9. Now therefore hearken unto their voice:

howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the

king that shall reign over them. 10. And Samuel told all the words of

the Lord unto the people that asked of him a king. 11. And he said,

This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: He will

take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to

be his horsemen: and some shall run before his chariots, 12. And he

will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties;

and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to

make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. 13. And

he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and

to be bakers. 14. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and

your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants.

15. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and

give to his officers, and to his servants. 16. And he will take your

men-servants, and your maid-servants, and your goodliest young men, and

your asses, and put them to his work. 17. He will take the tenth of

your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. 18. And ye shall cry out in

that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the

Lord will not hear you in that day. 19. Nevertheless the people refused

to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, Nay; but we will have a

king over us; 20. That we also may be like all the nations; and that

our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles.'--1

SAMUEL viii. 4-20.

The office of judge was as little capable of transmission from father

to son as that of prophet, so that Samuel's appointment of his sons as

judges must be regarded as contrary to its true idea. It was God who

made the judges, and the introduction, in however slight a degree, of

the hereditary principle, was not only politically a blunder, but

religiously wrong. Our narrative, like Scripture generally, pronounces

no opinion on the facts it records, but its unfavourable judgment may

be safely inferred from its explanation that Samuel was old' when he

made the appointment, and that his sons were corrupt and unjust. Our

text deals with the unexpectedly wide consequences of that act, in the

clamour for a king.

I. Note the ill-omened request. A formal delegation of the

representatives of the nation comes to Ramah, unsummoned by Samuel,

with the demand for a king. There must have been much talk through

Israel before the general mind could have been ascertained, and this

step taken. Not a whisper of what was passing seems to have reached

Samuel, and the request is flung at him in harsh language. It is not

pleasant for any one, least of all for a ruler, to be told that

everybody sees that he is getting old, and should provide for what is

to come next. Fathers do not like to be told that their sons are

disreputable, but Samuel had to hear the bitter truth. The old man was

pained by it, and felt that the people were tired of him, as is plain

enough from the divine words which followed, and bade him look beyond

the ingratitude displayed towards himself, to that shown to God. But

from the practical' point of view, there was a great deal to be said

for the reasonableness and political wisdom of the elders' suggestion.

Samuel had shown that he felt the danger of leaving the nation without

a leader, by his nomination of his sons, and the proposal of a king is

but carrying his policy a little farther. The hereditary principle once

admitted, a full-blown king was evidently the best. There were many

inconveniences in the rule by judges. They had no power but that of

force of personal character and the authority of an unseen Lord. They

left no successors; and long intervals had elapsed, and might again

elapse, between the death of one and the rise of another, during which

the nation appeared to have no head to guide nor arm to defend it.

Examples of strong monarchies surrounded them, and they wanted to have

a centre of unity and a defender in the person of a king.

Samuel's displeasure seems to have been mainly on the ground of the

insult to himself in the proposal, and its bearing on the rule of

Jehovah over the people does not seem to have occurred to him till it

was pointed out by the divine voice. But, like a good and wise man, he

took his perplexity and trouble to God; and there he got light. The

divine judgment of the request cuts down to its hidden, and probably

unconscious, motive, and shows Samuel that weariness of him was only

its surface, while the true bottom of it was rejection of God. The

parallel drawn with idolatry is very instructive. The two things were

but diverse forms of the same sense-ridden disposition: the one being

an inability to grasp the thought of the unseen God; the other, a

precisely similar inability to keep on the high level of trust in an

unseen defender, and obedience to an unseen monarch. They wished for a

king to go out before them' and fight their battles' (v. 20). Had they

forgotten Eben-ezer, and many another field, where they and their

fathers had but to stand still and see the Lord fight for them?

The very same difficulty in living in quiet reliance on a power which

is perceptible by no sense, besets us. We too are ever being tempted to

prefer the solid security, as our foolish senses call it, of visible

supports and delights, to the shadowy help of an unseen Arm. How many

of us would feel safer with a good balance at our banker's than with

God's promises! How many of us live as if we thought that men or women

were better recipients of our love and of our trust than God! How few,

even of professing Christians, really and habitually walk by faith, not

by sight'! Do we not see ourselves in the mirror of this story? If we

do not, we should. Note that the elders had, apparently, no idea that

they were rejecting God in wanting a king. Samuel says nothing of the

sort to them, and they could scarcely have made the request so boldly

and briefly if they had been conscious that it was upsetting the very

basis of their national life. Men are slow to appreciate the full force

of their craving for visible good. The petitioners could plead many

strong reasons, and, no doubt, fancied themselves simply taking proper

precautions for the future. A great deal of unavowed and unconscious

unbelief wears the mask of wise foresight. We rather pride ourselves on

our prudence, when we should be ashamed of our distrust.

Note, too, that we cannot combine reliance on the seen and the unseen.

Life must be moulded by one or the other. The craving for a king was

the rejection of Jehovah. We must elect by which we shall live, and

from which we shall draw our supreme good.

The desire to be like their neighbours was another motive with the

elders. It is hard to be singular, and to foster reliance on the

invisible, when all around us are dazzling examples of the success

attending the other course. One of the first lessons which we have to

learn, and one of the last which we have to practise, is a wholesome

disregard of other people's ways. If we are to do anything worth doing,

we must be content to be in a minority of one, if needful.

II. Note God's concession of the foolish wish. The divine word to

Samuel throws light on the nature of prophetic inspiration. He is

bidden to hearken to the people's voice'--a procedure directly opposite

to his own ideas. This is not a case of subsequent reflection modifying

first impressions, but of an authoritative voice discerned by the

hearer to be not his own, contradicting his own thoughts, and leaving

no room for further consideration.

Further, the granting to Israel of the king whom they desired, is but

one instance of the law which is exemplified in God's dealing with

nations and individuals, according to which He lets them have their own

way, that they may be filled with their own devices.' Such experience

is the best teacher, though her school fees are high. The surest way to

disgust men with their own folly, is to let it work out its results,--

just as boys in sweetmeat shops are allowed to eat as much as they like

at first, and so get a distaste for the dainties. Try it, then, and see

how you like it,' is not an unkind thing to say, and God often says it

to us. When argument and appeals to duty and the like fail, there is

nothing more to be done but to let us have our request, and find out

the poison that lurked under the fair outside. The prodigal son gets

his coveted portion, and is allowed to go into the far country, that he

may prove how good and happy it is to starve among the swine, not

because his father is angry with him, but because such experience is

the only way to re-awaken his dormant love, and to make him long for

the despised place in his father's house. There are some fevers of the

desires which must run their course before the patient can be well

again. Let us keep a careful watch over ourselves, that we entertain no

wishes but such as run parallel with God's manifest will, lest He may

have in His anger, which is still love, to give us our request, that we

may find out our error by the bitter fruits of a granted desire.

III. Note the obstinacy that, with eyes open to the consequences,

persists in its demands. Samuel is bidden to show them the manner of

the king that shall reign over them.' He sketches, in sombre outline,

the picture of an Eastern despot, the only kind of king which the world

then knew. The darker features of these monarchies are not included.

There is no harem, nor cruelty, nor monstrous vice, in the picture; but

the diversion of labour to minister to royal pomp, the establishment of

a standing army, the alienation of land to officials, heavy taxation

and forced labour make up the items. To these is added (v. 18) that the

royalty, now so eagerly desired, would sooner or later become a burden,

and that then they or their sons would find it was easier to put on

than to put off the yoke; for the Lord will not hear you in that day,'

in reference, that is, to the removal of the king. They were exchanging

an unseen King who gave all things for one who would take, and not

give. A wise exchange! The consequences of our wishes are not always

drawn out so clearly before us as in this instance; but we are not left

in darkness as to the broad issues, and we all know enough to make our

persistence in evil, after such warnings, the deepest mystery and most

flagrant sin. The drunkard is not deterred by his knowledge that there

is such a thing as delirium tremens; nor the thief, by the certainty

that the officer's hand will be laid on his shoulder one day or other;

nor the young profligate, by the danger that his bones shall be full of

the sin of his youth'; nor are any of us kept from our sins, by the

clear sight of their end. I have loved strangers, and after them will I

go,' notwithstanding all knowledge of the fatal issue. Surely there is

nothing sadder than that power of neglecting the most certain known

result of our acts. Wilfully blind, and hurried on by lust, passion, or

other impulse, like bulls which shut their eyes when they charge, we

rush at our mark, and often dash ourselves to pieces on it. If a man

saw the consequences of his sin at the moment of temptation, he would

not do it; but this is the wonder, that he does not see them, though he

knows them well enough, and that the knowledge has no power to restrain

him.

IV. Note the divine purpose which uses man's sin as its instrument in

advancing its designs. God had promised Israel a king (Deut. xvii. 14,

etc.), and the elders may have thought that they were only asking for

what was in accordance with His plan. So they were; but their motive

was wrong, and so their prayer, though for what God meant to give, was

wrong. In this case, as always, God uses men's sins as occasions for

the furtherance of His own eternal purpose, as that profound saying has

it, Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee.' The kingly office was a

step in advance, and gave occasion to the development of Messianic

expectations of the true King of Israel and of men, which would have

been impossible without it, In many ways it was for the good of the

nation, and the holders of the office were the Lord's anointed.' Modern

criticism has found traces of two opposite views in this story, as

compared with the passage in Deuteronomy above referred to; but surely

it is a more sober, though less novel, view, to regard the whole

incident as illustrating the two truths, that men may wish for right

things in a wrong way, and that God uses sin as well as obedience as

His instrument. No barriers can stop the march of His great purpose

through the ages, any more than a bit of glass can stay a sunbeam.

However the currents run and the storms howl, they carry the ship to

the haven; for He holds the helm, and all winds help. The people

rejected Him, and in seeking a king followed but their own earthly

minds; but they prepared the way for David and David's Son. Their

children long after, moved by the same spirit, shouted, We have no king

but Caesar!' but they prepared the throne for the true King, for whom

they destined a Cross. Man's greatest sin, the rejection of the visible

King of the world, brought about the firm establishment of His dominion

on earth and in heaven. The cross is the great instance of the same law

as is embodied in this history,--the overruling providence which bends

the antagonism of men into a tool for effecting the purpose of God.

Alas for those who only thus carry on God's designs! They perish, and

their work is none the less their sin, because God has used it. How

much better to enter with a willing heart and a clear intelligence into

sympathy with His designs, and, delighting to do His will, to share in

the eternal duration of His triumphant purpose! The world passeth away,

and the fashion thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for

ever.'

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THE OLD JUDGE AND THE YOUNG KING

Now the Lord had told Samuel In his ear a day before Saul came, saying,

16, To-morrow, about this time I will send thee a man out of the land

of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over My people

Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines:

for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto Me.

17. And when Samuel saw Saul, the Lord said unto him, Behold the man

whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people. 18. Then

Saul drew near to Samuel in the gate, and said, Tell me, I pray thee,

where the seer's house is. 19. And Samuel answered Saul, and said, I am

the seer: go up before me unto the high place; for ye shall eat with me

to-day, and to-morrow I will let thee go, and will tell thee all that

is in thine heart. 20. And as for thine asses that were lost three days

ago, set not thy mind on them; for they are found. And on whom is all

the desire of Israel? Is it not on thee, and on all thy father's house?

21. And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest

of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of

the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me? 22. And

Samuel took Saul and his servant, and brought them into the parlour,

and made them sit in the chiefest place among them that were bidden,

which were about thirty persons. 23. And Samuel said unto the cook,

Bring the portion which I gave thee, of which I said unto thee, Set it

by thee. 24. And the cook took up the shoulder, and that which was upon

it, and set it before Saul. And Samuel said, Behold that which is left

I set it before thee, and eat: for unto this time hath it been kept for

thee since I said, I have invited the people. So Saul did eat with

Samuel that day. 25. And when they were come down from the high place

into the city, Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house. 26.

And they arose early: and it came to pass about the spring of the day,

that Samuel called Saul to the top of the house, saying, Up, that I may

send thee away. And Saul arose, and they went out both of them, he and

Samuel, abroad. 27. And as they were going down to the end of the city,

Samuel said to Saul, Bid the servant pass on before us, (and he passed

on,) but stand thou still a while, that I may shew thee the word of

God.'--1 SAMUEL ix. 15-27.

Both the time and the place of the incidents here told are unknown. No

note is given of the interval that had elapsed since the elders'

deputation. All that we know is that on the previous day Samuel had had

the divine communication mentioned in verse 15, and that some days are

implied as spent by Saul in his quest for his fathers asses, Equally

uncertain is the name of the city. It was not Samuel's ordinary

residence; it was in the land of Zuph,' an unknown district; it was

perched, like most of the cities, on a hill; it had fountains lower

down the slope, and a high place' farther up, where there was a

building large enough for a feast. How strangely vivid the picture of

this anonymous city is, and how we can yet see the maidens coming down

to the fountains, the wearied travellers toiling up, and the voluble

abundance of the directions given them!

I. The first thing we have to note is the premonitory word of the Lord.

Observe the picturesque and forcible expression, had uncovered the ear

of Samuel.' It is more than picturesque. It gives in the strongest form

the fact of a revelation, both as to its origin and its secrecy. It is

vain to represent the transition from judgeship to monarchy as a mere

political revolution, inaugurated by Samuel as a fore-seeing statesman.

It is misleading to speak of him, as Dean Stanley does, as one of the

men who mediate between the old and the new. His opinions and views go

for just nothing in the transaction, and he is simply God's instrument.

The people's desire for the king, and God's answer to it, were equally

independent of him. His own ideas were dead against the change, and at

each step in bringing it about the divine causality is everything, and

he is nothing but its obedient servant. It is hopeless to sift out a

naturalistic explanation from the narrative, which is either

supernatural or nothing. Note the three points of this communication,--

God's sending Saul, the command to anoint, and the motive ascribed to

God. As to the first, how striking that full-toned authoritative I will

send' is! Think of the chain of ordinary events which brought Saul to

the little city,--the wandering of a drove of asses, the failure to get

on their tracks, the accident of being in the land of Zuph when he got

tired of the search, the suggestion of the servant; and behind all

these, and working through them, the will and hand of God, thrusting

this man, all unconscious, along a path which he knew not. Our own

purposes we may know, but God's we do not know. There is something

awful in the thought of the issues that may spring from the smallest

affairs, and we shall be bewildered and paralysed if once we get a

glimpse of the complicated web which is ever being woven in the loom of

time, unless we, too, can, by faith, see the Weaver, and then we shall

be at rest. Call nothing trivial, and seek to be conscious of His

guiding hand.

The command to Samuel to anoint Saul is no product of Samuel's own

reflection, but comes to him, in this imperative form, before he has

seen Saul, like a commission in blank, in regard to which he has no

option, and in the origin of which he had no share. It was a piece of

painful work to devolve his authority, like Aaron's having to strip off

his robes before he died, and to put them on his son. But there is no

trace of wounded feeling in Samuel. He is true to his childhood's word,

Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and, no doubt, he had the reward which

obedience ever has to sweeten the bitterest draught, the reward of a

quiet heart.

The reason as given in the last clause of the verse ought to have made

Samuel's self-abnegation easier. God sets him the example. Israel had

rejected Him, but He still calls them My people,' and looks upon them

in tender care, and hears their cry. There is no contradiction here

with the aspect of the concession to the people's wish, which appeared

in the former section. Hasty criticism tries to make out discrepancies

in the accounts, because it does not recognise one of the plainest

characteristics of Scripture; namely, its habit of stating strongly and

exclusively that side of a complicated matter which is relevant to the

purpose in hand, and leaving the other sides to be presented in due

time. The three accounts of the election give three different reasons

for it. In chapter viii., the people put it on the ground of Samuel's

age and his son's unfitness, and God treats it as national rejection of

Him. Here it appears as due, on the part of the people, to their fear

of the Philistines, and on the part of God to His loving yielding to

their cry. In 1 Samuel xii. 12, Samuel traces it to the fear of

Ammonite invasion. Are these contradictory or supplementary accounts?

Certainly the latter. Though Israel had in heart rejected God, and He

gave them a king that they might learn how much better they would have

been without one, it is as true that He lovingly listened to the cry of

their fear, and answered them, in pity and tender care, by giving them

the king whom they desired, and who would deliver them from their

enemies. Let us learn how patient of our faithless follies, and how

full of long-suffering love, even in anger,' He is. The same gift of

His providence, regarded in one light, is loving chastisement, and in

another is loving compliance with our cry and swift help to our need in

the shape that we desire, but in both aspects is good and perfect.

Note, too, that God's look is active, and is the bringing of the needed

aid, and that He waits for our cry before He comes with His help.

II. The meeting of Samuel and Saul. They encounter each other in the

gate,--the prophet on his way to the sacrifice, the future king with

his head full of his humble quest. Samuel knows Saul by divine

intimation as soon as he sees him, but Saul does not know Samuel. His

question indicates the noble simplicity, without attendants or

trappings, of the judge's life; but it also suggests the strange

isolation of these early days, and the probable indifference of Saul to

religion. If he had cared much about God's rule in Israel, he could

scarcely have been so ignorant as his servant's words about the seer,'

and his failure to know him when he saw him, show Saul to have been. He

had not cared to see Samuel in any of the latter's circuits, and now he

only wants to get some information from a diviner about these

unfortunate asses. What a contrast between the thoughts of the two, as

they looked at each other! Saul begins by consulting Samuel as a

magician; he ends by seeking counsel from the witch at Endor. Samuel's

words are beautiful in their smothering of all personal feeling, and

dignified in their authority. He at once takes command of Saul, and

prepares him by half-hints for something great to come. The direction

to go up before me' is a sign of honour. The invitation to the

sacrificial feast is another. The promise to disclose his own secret

thoughts to Saul may, perhaps, point to some hidden ambitions, the

knowledge of which would prove Samuel's prophetic character. The

assurance as to the asses answers the small immediate occasion of

Saul's resort to him, and the dim hint in the last words of verse 20,

rightly translated, tells him that all that is desirable in Israel' is

for him, and for all his father's house. He went out to look for his

father's asses, and he found a kingdom. The words were enigmatical; but

if Saul knew of the impending revolution, they could scarcely fail to

dazzle him and take away his breath. His answer is more than mere

Oriental self-depreciation. Its bashful modesty contrasts sadly with

the almost insane masterfulness and arrogant self-will of his later

years. Fair beginnings may end ill, and those who are set in positions

of influence have hard work to keep steady heads, and to sail with low

sails.

III. The feast. Up at the high place was some chamber used for the

feasts which followed the sacrifices. A company of thirty--or,

according to another reading, of seventy--persons had been invited, and

the stately young stranger from Benjamin, with his servant (a trait of

the simple manners of these days), is set in the place of honour, where

wondering eyes fasten on him. Attention is still more emphatically

centred on him when Samuel bids the cook' bring a part of the sacrifice

which he had been ordered to set aside. It proves to be the shoulder'

or thigh,' the priest's perquisite, and therefore probably Samuel's. To

give this to another was equivalent to putting him in Samuel's place;

and Samuel's words in handing it to Saul make its meaning plain. It is

that which hath been reserved.' It has been kept for thee' till the

appointed time,' and that with a view to the assembled guests. All this

is in true prophetic fashion, which delighted in symbols, and these of

the homeliest sort. The whole transaction expressed the transference of

power to Saul, the divine reserving of the monarchy for him, and the

public investiture with it, by the prophet himself. The veil was

intentional, and intentionally thin. Cannot we see the flush of

surprise and modesty on Saul's cheek, as he tore the pieces from the

significant shoulder,' and hear the whispers that ran through the

guest-chamber?

IV. The private colloquy. When the simple feast was over, the strangely

assorted pair went down to Samuel's house, and there, on the quiet

house-top, where were no curious ears, held long and earnest talk. No

doubt Samuel told Saul all that was in his heart, as he had said that

he would, and convinced him thereby that it was God who was speaking to

him through the prophet. Nor would exhortations and warnings be

wanting, which the old man's experience would be anxious to give, and

the young one's modesty not unwilling to receive. Saul is a listener,

not a speaker, in this unreported interview; and Samuel is in it, as

throughout, the superior. The characteristic which marked the beginning

of the Jewish monarchy was stamped on it till the end. The king was

inferior to the prophet, and was meant to take his instructions from

him when he appeared. Saul was docile on that first day, when he was

half dazed with his new prospects, and wholly grateful to Samuel; but

the history will show us how soon the fair promise of concord was

darkened, and how fiercely he chafed at Samuel's attempted control.

One can fancy his thoughts as he lay in the starlight, on the

house-top, that night, and gazed into the astounding future that had

opened before him. Had there been any true religion in him, it would

have been a wakeful night of prayer. But, more likely, as the event

proves, the ambition and arrogance which were deep in his nature,

though hitherto undeveloped, were his counsellors, and drove Samuel's

wisdom out of his head.

As soon as the morning-red began to rise in the East, Samuel sent him

away, to secure, as would appear, privacy in his departure. With simple

courtesy the prophet accompanied his guest, and as soon as they had got

down the hill beyond the last house of the city, he bids Saul send on

his servant, that he may speak a last word to him alone. Our text stops

before the solemn anointing, and leaves these two standing there, in

the fresh morning, type of the new career opening for one of them. What

a contrast in the men! The one has all his long life been true to his

first vow, Speak, for Thy servant heareth,' and now has come, in

fulness of years, and reverenced by all men, near the end of his

patient, faithful service. His work is all but done, and his heart is

quiet in the peace which is the best reward of loving and doing God's

law. Ripened wisdom, calm trust, unhesitating submission cast a glory

round the old man, who is now performing the supreme act of

self-abnegation of his lifetime, and, not without a sense of relief, is

laying the burden, so long and uncomplainingly borne, on the great

shoulders of this young giant. The other has a humble past of a few

years rapidly sinking out of his dazzled sight, and is in a whirl of

emotion at the startling suddenness of his new dignity. When one thinks

of Gilboa, and the desperate suicide there, how pathetic is that

strong, jubilant young figure, in the morning light, below the city, as

he bows his head to receive the anointing which, little as he knew it,

was to prove his ruin! A life begun by obedient listening to God's

voice, and continued in the same, comes at last to a blessed end, and

is crowned with many goods. A life which but partially accepts God's

will as its law, and rather takes counsel of its own passions and

arrogant self-sufficiency, may have much that is bright and lovable at

its beginning, but will steadily darken as it goes on, and will set at

last in eclipse and gloom.

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THE KING AFTER MAN'S HEART

And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh; 18. And

said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I

brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of

the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that

oppressed you; 19. And ye have this day rejected your God, who Himself

saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations; and ye

have said unto Him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now therefore present

yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands. 20.

And when Samuel had caused all the tribes of Israel to come near, the

tribe of Benjamin was taken. 21. When he had caused the tribe of

Benjamin to come near by their families, the family of Matri was taken,

and Saul the son of Kish was taken: and when they sought him, he could

not be found. 22. Therefore they enquired of the Lord further, if the

man should yet come thither. And the Lord answered, Behold, he hath hid

himself among the stuff. 23. And they ran and fetched him thence: and

when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people

from his shoulders and upward. 24. And Samuel said to all the people,

See ye him whom the Lord hath chosen, that there is none like him among

all the people? And all the people shouted, and said, God save the

king. 25. Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and

wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the Lord. And Samuel sent all

the people away, every man to his house. 26. And Saul also went home to

Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had

touched. 27. But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save

us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his

peace.'--1 SAMUEL x. 17-27.

These verses fit on to chapter viii., chapters ix. to x. 16, being

probably from another source, inserted here because the anointing of

Saul, told in them, did occur between Samuel's dismissal of the people

and his summoning of the national assembly which is here related. That

private anointing of Saul was the divine call to him individually; the

text tells of his public designation to the nation. The two are

perfectly consistent, and, indeed, the private anointing is presupposed

in the incident recorded in this passage, of Saul's hiding himself, for

he could not have known the result that he would be taken,' unless he

had had that previous intimation. The assembly at Mizpah was not

convened in order to choose a king, but to accept God's choice, which

was then to be declared.

But before the choice was announced, a last appeal was made to the

people, if, perchance, they might still be persuaded to forgo their

rebellious desire. It is not, indeed, said that this final, all but

hopeless attempt was made by Samuel at the divine command, and we are

not told that he had any further revelation than that in chapter viii.

7-9. But, no doubt, he was speaking as Jehovah's mouthpiece, and so we

have here one more instance of that long-suffering divine patience and

love which hopeth all things,' and lingers pleadingly round the

alienated heart, seeking to woo it back to itself, and never ceasing to

labour to avert the evil deed, till it is actually and irrevocably

done. It may be said that God knew that the appeal was sure to fail,

and therefore could not have made it. But is not that mysterious

continuance of effort, foreknown to be futile, the very paradox of

God's love? Did not Jesus give the traitor the sop, as a last token of

friendship, a last appeal to his heart? And does not God still in like

manner deal with us all?

Observe how He seeks to win Israel back. It is not by threatenings, but

by reminders of His great benefits. He will not drive men back to His

service, like a slave-driver with brandished whip, but He wishes to

draw them back by the cords of love.' It is service from hearts melted

by thankfulness, and therefore overflowing in joyful, willing obedience

and grateful acts, that He desires. The mercies of God' should lead to

men offering themselves as living sacrifices.'

The last appeal failed, and Samuel at once went on to give the people

the desired bitter which they thought so sweet. Of course, it was by

their representatives that the tribes presented themselves before God.

The manner of making God's choice known is not told, and speculations

as to it are idle. Probably a simple yes or no, as each tribe, family

or individual was presented' was the mode, but how it was conveyed is

quite unknown. That is a small matter; more important is it to note

that Saul was chosen simply because he was the very type of the

national ideal of a hero-king. Both here and in chapter ix. 2 his

stature and bravery are the only qualities mentioned. What Israel

wanted was a rough fighter, with physical strength, plenty of bone and

muscle. About moral, intellectual or spiritual qualities they did not

care, and they got the kind of king that they wanted,--the only kind

that they could appreciate. The only way to teach them that one who was

a head and shoulders taller than any of them was not thereby certified

to be the ideal king, was to give them such a man, and let them see

what good he would do them.

There is no surer index nor sharper test of national or individual

character than the sort of heroes' they worship. Vox populi has not

been very much refined since Saul's day. Athletes and soldiers still

captivate the crowd, and a mere prophet like Samuel has no chance

beside the man of broad shoulders and well-developed biceps. And very

often communities, especially democratic ones, get the king' they

desire, the leader, statesman or the like, who comes near their ideal.

The man whom they choose is the man whom, generally, they deserve.

Israel had an excuse for its burst of ardour for a soldier, for it was

in deadly danger from the Philistines. Is there as good an excuse for

us in Britain, in our recent adoration of successful generals? Israel

found out that its idol lacked higher gifts than thews and sinews, and

experience taught them the falseness of their ideal.

Saul's hiding among the piles of miscellaneous baggage, which the

multitude of representatives had brought with them, is usually set down

to his credit, as indicating an engaging modesty; but there is another

and more probable explanation of it, less creditable to him. Was it not

rather occasioned by his shrinking from the heavy task that God was

laying on him? He was not being summoned to a secure throne, but to go

out before us, and fight our battles.' He might well shrink, but if he

had been God-fearing and God-obeying and God-trusting, he would have

cried, Here am I! send me,' instead of skulking among the stuff. There

was another Saul, who could say, I was not disobedient unto the

heavenly vision.' It had been better for the son of Kish if he had been

like the young Pharisee from Tarsus. We too have divine calls in our

lives, and alas! we too not seldom hide ourselves among the stuff, and

try to avoid taking up some heavy duty, by absorbing our minds in

material good. Few things have greater power of obscuring the heavenly

vision,' and of rendering us unwilling to obey it, than the clinging to

the things of this world, which are in their place as the traveller's

luggage needful on the road, but very much out of their place when they

become a hiding-place for a man whom God is calling to service.

The manner of the kingdom,' which Samuel wrote and laid up before the

Lord, was probably not the same as the manner of the king' (chapter

viii. 9-18), but a kind of constitution, or solemn statement of the

principles which were to govern the monarchy. The reading in verse 26

should probably be the men of valour,' instead of a band of men.' They

were brave men, whose hearts God had touched.' Now that Saul was chosen

by God, loyalty to God was shown by loyalty to Saul. The sin of the

people's desire, and the drop from the high ideal of the theocracy, and

the lack of lofty qualities in Saul, may all be admitted. But God has

made him king, and that is enough. Henceforward, God's servants will be

Saul's partisans. The malcontents were apparently but a small faction.

They, perhaps, had had a candidate of their own, but, at all events,

they criticised God's appointed deliverer, and saw nothing in him to

warrant the expectation that he would be able to do much for Israel.

Disparaging criticism of God's chosen instruments comes from distrust

of God who chose them. To doubt the divinely sent Deliverer's power to

save' is to accuse God of not knowing our needs and of miscalculating

the power of His supply of them. But not a few of us put that same

question in various tones of incredulity, scorn or indifference. Sense

makes many mistakes when it takes to trying to weigh Christ in its

vulgar balances, and to settling whether He looks like a Saviour and a

King.

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SAMUEL'S CHALLENGE AND CHARGE

And Samuel said unto all Israel, Behold, I have hearkened unto your

voice in all that ye said unto me, and have made a king over you. 2.

And now, behold, the king walketh before you: and I am old and

grayheaded; and, behold, my sons are with you: and I have walked before

you from my childhood unto this day. 3. Behold, here I am: witness

against me before the Lord, and before His anointed: whose ox have I

taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I

oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine

eyes therewith? and I will restore it you. 4. And they said, Thou hast

not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of

any man's hand. 5. And he said unto them, The Lord is witness against

you, and His anointed is witness this day, that ye have not found ought

in my hand. And they answered, He is witness. 6. And Samuel said unto

the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that

brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. 7. Now therefore

stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the

righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. 8.

When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord,

then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers

out of Egypt, and them dwell in this place. 9. And when they forgat the

Lord their God, He sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the

host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand

of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. 10. And they cried

unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the

Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth: but now deliver us out of

the hand of our enemies, and we will serve Thee. 11. And the Lord sent

Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out

of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. 12. And

when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against

you, ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the

Lord your God was your king. 13. Now therefore behold the king whom ye

have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a

king over you. 14. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey

His voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then

shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue

following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye will not obey the voice of

the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the

hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers.'--1

SAMUEL xii. 1-15.

The portion of Samuel's address included in this passage has three main

sections: his noble and dignified assertion of his official purity, his

summary of the past history, and his solemn declaration of the

conditions of future wellbeing for the nation with its new king.

I. Probably the war with the Ammonite king Nahash, which had postponed

the formal inauguration of the king, had been carried on in the

neighbourhood of the Jordan valley; and thus Gilgal would be a

convenient rendezvous. But it was chosen for other reasons also, and,

as appears from 1 Samuel x. 8, had been fixed on by Samuel at his first

interview with Saul. There the Covenant had been renewed, after the

wanderers had crossed the river, with Joshua at their head, and it was

fitting that the beginnings of the new form of the national life should

be consecrated by worship on the same site as had witnessed the

beginnings of the national life on the soil of the promised land.

Perhaps the silent stones, which Joshua reared, stood there yet. At all

events, sacred memories could scarcely fail, as the rejoicing crowd,

standing where their fathers had renewed the Covenant, saw the

blackened ruins of Jericho, and the foaming river, now, as then,

filling all its banks in the time of harvest, which their fathers had

crossed with the ark, that was now hidden at Kirjath-jearim, for their

guide. The very place spoke the same lessons from the past which Samuel

was about to teach them.

There is just a faint trace of Samuel's disapproval of the new order in

his first words. He takes care to throw the whole responsibility on the

people; but, at the same time, he assumes the authoritative tone which

becomes him, and quietly takes the position of superiority to the king

whom he has made. I Samuel xi. 15 seems to imply that he took no part

in the rejoicings. It was Saul and all the men of Israel' who were so

glad. He was still hesitant as to the issue, and obeyed the divine

command with clearer insight into its purpose than the shouting crowd

and the proud young king had. There is something very pathetic in the

contrast he draws between Saul and himself. The king walketh before

you,' in all the vigour of his young activity, and delighting all your

eyes, and I am old and gray-headed,' feeble, and fit for little more

work, and therefore, as happens to such worn-out public servants, cast

aside for a new man. Samuel was not a monster of perfection without

human feelings. His sense of Israel's ingratitude to himself and

practical revolt from God lay together in his mind, and colour this

whole speech, which has a certain tone of severity, and an absence of

all congratulation. Probably that accounts for the mention of his sons.

The elders' frank statement of their low opinion of them had been a

sore point with Samuel, and he cannot help alluding to it. It was not

for want of possible successors in his own house that they had cried

out for a king. If this be not the bearing of the allusion to his sons,

it is difficult to explain; and this obvious explanation would never

have been overlooked if Samuel had not been idealised into a faultless

saint. The dash of human infirmity and fatherly blindness gives reality

to the picture. I have walked before you from my youth unto this day.'

Note the recurrence of the same expression as is applied to Saul in the

former part of the verse. It is as if he had said, Once I was as he is

now,--young and active in your sight, and for your service. Remember

these past years. May your new fancy's record be as stainless as mine

is, when he is old and grayheaded!' The words bring into view the

characteristic of Samuel's life which is often insisted on in the

earlier chapters,--its calm, unbroken continuity and uniformity of

direction, from the long-past days when he wore the little coat' his

mother made him, with so many tears dropped on it, till this closing

hour. While everything was rushing down to destruction in Eli's time,

and his sons were rioting at the Tabernacle door, the child was growing

up in the stillness; and from then till now, amid all changes, his

course had been steady, and pointed to one aim. Blessed they whose age

is but the fruitage of the promise of their youth! Blessed they who

begin as little children,' with the forgiveness of sin and the

knowledge of the Father, and who go on, as young men,' to overcome the

Evil One, and end, as fathers,' with the deeper knowledge of Him who is

from the beginning,' which is the reward of childhood's trust and

manhood's struggles!

Samuel is still a prophet, but he is ceasing to be the sole authority,

and, in his conscious integrity, calls for a public, full discharge, in

the presence of the king. Note that verse 3 gives the first instance of

the use of the name Messiah,' and think of the contrast between Saul

and Jesus. Observe, too, the simple manners of these times, when ox and

ass' were the wealth. They would be poor plunder nowadays. Note also

the various forms of injustice of which he challenges any one to

convict him. Forcible seizure of live stock, fraud, harsh oppression,

and letting suitors put gold on his eyes that he might not see, are the

vices of the Eastern ruler to-day, and rampant in that unhappy land, as

they have been ever since Samuel's time. I think I have heard of

politicians in some other countries further west than Gilgal, who have

axes to grind and logs to roll, and of the wonderful effects, in many

places of business, of certain circular gold discs applied to the eyes.

This man went away a poor man. He does not seem to have had salary, or

retiring pension; but he carried away a pair of clean hands, as the

voice of a nation witnessed.

II. Having cleared himself, Samuel recounts the outlines of the past,

in order to emphasise the law that cleaving to God had ever brought

deliverance; departure, disaster; and penitence, restoration. It is

history with a purpose, and less careful about chronology than

principles. Facts are good, if illuminated by the clear recognition of

the law which they obey; but, without that, they are lumber. The

philosophy of history' is not reached without the plain recognition of

the working of the divine will. No doubt the principles which Samuel

discerned written as with a sunbeam on the past of Israel were

illustrated there with a certainty and directness which belonged to it

alone; but we shall make a bad use of the history of Israel, if we say,

It is all miraculous, and therefore inapplicable to modern national

life.' It would be much nearer the mark to say, It is all miraculous,

and therefore meant as an exhibition for blind eyes of the eternal

principles which govern the history of all nations.' It is as true in

Britain to-day as ever it was in Judea, that righteousness and the fear

of God are the sure foundations of real national as of individual

prosperity. The kingdoms of this world are not the devil's, though

diplomatists and soldiers seem to think so. If any nation were to live

universally by the laws of God, it might not have what the world calls

national success; it would have no story of wholesale robbery, called

military glory, but it would have peace within its borders, and life

would go nobly and sweetly there. Happy is the people, that is in such

a case: yea, happy is the people, whose God is the Lord.'

The details of Samuel's resume need not occupy much time. Note the word

in verse 7, reason,' or, as the Revised Version renders, plead.' He

takes the position of God's advocate in the suit, and what he will

prove for his client is the righteousness' of his dealings in the past.

The story, says he, can be brought down to very simple elements,--a cry

to God, an answer of deliverance, a relapse, punishment, a renewed cry

to God, and all the rest of the series as before. It is like a

repeating decimal, over and over again, each figure drawing the next

after it. The list of oppressors in verse 9, and that of deliverers in

verse 11, do not follow the same order, but that matters nothing.

Clearly the facts are assumed as well known, and needing only summary

reference. The new-fashioned way of treating Biblical history, of

course, takes that as an irrefutable proof of the late date and

spuriousness of this manufactured speech put into Samuel's mouth. Less

omniscient students will be content with accepting the witness to the

history. Nobody knows anything of a judge named Bedan, and the

conjectural emendation Barak' is probable, especially remembering the

roll-call in the Epistle to the Hebrews, where Gideon, Barak, and

Jephthah appear in the same order, with the addition of Samson. The

supposition that Samuel,' in this verse, is an error for Samson,' is

unnecessary; for the prophet's mention of himself thus is not

unnatural, in the circumstances, and is less obtrusive than to have

said me.'

The retrospect here given points the lesson of the sin and folly of the

demand for a king. The old way had been to cry to God in their

distresses, and the old experience had been that the answer came swift

and sufficient; but this generation had tried a new method, and fear of

Nahash the Ammonite' had driven them to look for a man to help them.

The experience of God's responses to prayer does not always wean even

those who receive them from casting about for visible helpers. Still

less does the experience of our predecessors keep us from it. Strange

that after a hundred plain instances of His aid, the hundred and first

distress should find us almost as slow to turn to Him, and as eager to

secure earthly stays, as if there were no past of our own, or of many

generations, all crowded and bright with tokens of His care! We are

always disposed to doubt whether the power that delivered from Sisera,

Philistines, and Moab, will be able to deliver us from Nahash. The new

danger looks the very worst of all, and this time we must have a king.

All the while Israel had God for its king. Our dim eyes cannot see the

realities of the invisible world, and so we cleave to the illusions of

the visible, which, at their best, are but shadows of the real, and are

often made, by our weak hearts, its rival and substitute. What does the

soldier, who has an impenetrable armour to wear, want with pasteboard

imitations, like those worn in a play? It is doubtful wisdom to fling

away the substance in grasping at the shadow. Saul was brave, and a

head and shoulders above the people, and he had beaten Nahash for them;

but Saul for God is a poor exchange. Do we do better, when we hanker

after something more tangible than an unseen Guide, Helper, Stay, Joy,

and Peace-bringer for our hearts, and declare plainly, by our eager

race after created good, that we do not reckon God by Himself enough

for us?

III. The part of Samuel's address with which we are concerned here

closes with the application of the history to the present time. The

great point of the last three verses is that the new order of things

has not changed the old law, which bound up well-being inseparably with

obedience. They have got their king, and there he stands; but if they

think that that is to secure their prosperity, they are much mistaken.

There is a touch of rebuke, and possibly of sarcasm, in pointing to

Saul, and making so emphatic, as in verse 13, the vehemence of their

anxiety to get him. It is almost as if Samuel had said, Look at him,

and say whether he is worth all that eagerness. Do you like him as

well, now that you have him, as you did before?' There are not many of

this world's goods which stand that test. The shell that looked silvery

and iridescent when in the sea is but a poor, pale reminder of its

former self, when we hold it dry in our hands. One object of desire,

and only one, brings no disappointment in possessing it. He, and only

he, who sets his hope on God, will never have to feel that he is not so

satisfied with the fulfilment as with the dream.

Israel had rejected God in demanding a king; but the giver of their

demand had been God, and their rejection had not abolished the divine

government, nor altered one jot of the old law. They and their king

were equally its subjects. There is great emphasis in the special

mention of your king' as bound to obedience as much as they; and, if we

follow the Septuagint reading of verse 15, the mention is repeated

there in the threatening of punishment. No abundance of earthly

supports or objects of our love or trust in the least alters the

unalterable conditions of well-being. Whether surrounded with these or

stripped of all, to fear and serve the Lord and to hearken to His voice

is equally the requisite for all true blessedness, and is so equally to

the helper and the helped, the lover and the loved. We are ever tempted

to think that, when our wishes are granted, and some dear or strong

hand is stretched out for aid, all will be well; and we are terribly

apt to forget that we need God as much as before, and that the way of

being blessed has not changed. Those whose hearts and homes are bright

with loved faces, and whose lives are guarded by strong and wise hands,

have need to remember that they and their dear ones are under the same

conditions of well-being as are the loneliest and saddest; and they who

have none other that fighteth for' them have no less need to remember

that, if God be their companion, they cannot be utterly solitary, nor

altogether helpless if He be their aid.

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OLD TRUTH FOR A NEW EPOCH

Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have

desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over yon. 14. If ye will

fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey His voice, and not rebel against

the commandment of the Lord; then shall both ye, and also the king that

reigneth over you, continue following the Lord your God: 15. But if ye

will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment

of the Lord; then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was

against your fathers. 16. Now therefore stand and see this great thing,

which the Lord will do before your eyes. 17. Is it not wheat-harvest

to-day! I will call unto the Lord, and He shall send thunder and rain;

that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye

have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. 18. So Samuel

called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and

all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. 19. And all the

people said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God,

that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask

us a king. 20. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done

all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but

serve the Lord with all your heart; 21. And turn ye not aside: for then

should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver, for

they are vain. 22. For the Lord will not forsake His people for His

great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you His

people. 23. Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against

the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and

the right way: 24. Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all

your heart: for consider how great things He hath done for you. 25. But

if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your

king.'--1 SAMUEL xii. 13-25.

Samuel's office as judge necessarily ended when Saul was made king, but

his office of prophet continued. This chapter deals with both the

cessation and the continuance, giving at first his dignified, and

somewhat pained, vindication of his integrity, and then passing on to

show him exercising his prophetic function in exhortation, miracle, and

authoritative declaration of Jehovah's will.

I. The first point is the sign which Samuel gave. Usually there is no

rain in Palestine from about the end of April till October. Samuel was

speaking during the wheat harvest, which falls about the beginning of

June. We note that he volunteered the sign, and, what is still more

remarkable, that he is sure that God will send it in answer to his

prayer. Why was he thus certain? Because he recognised that the impulse

to proffer the sign came from God. We know little of the mental

processes by which a prophet could discriminate between his own

thinkings and God's speech, but such discrimination was possible, or

there could have been no ring of confidence in the prophet's Thus saith

the Lord.' Not even a Samuel among them that call upon His name' had a

right to assume that every asking would certainly have an answer. It is

when we ask anything according to His will' that we know that He

heareth us,' and are entitled to predict to others the sure answer.

It seems a long leap logically from hearing the thunder and seeing the

rain rushing down on the harvest field, to recognising the sin of

asking for a king. But the connecting steps are plain. Samuel announced

the storm, he asked God to send it, it came at his word; therefore he

was approved of God and was His messenger; therefore his words about

the desire for a king were God's words. Again, God sent the tempest;

therefore God ruled the elemental powers, and wielded them so as to

affect Israel, and therefore it had been folly and sin to wish for

another defender. So the result of the thunder-burst was twofold--they

feared Jehovah and Samuel,' and they confessed their sin in desiring a

king. They were but rude and sense-bound men, like children in many

respects; their religion was little more than outward worship and a

vague awe; they needed signs' as children need picture-books. The very

slightness and superficiality of their religion made their confession

easy and swift, and neither the one nor the other went deep enough to

be lasting. The faith that is built on signs and wonders' is easily

battered down; the repentance that is due to a thunderstorm is over as

soon as the sun comes out again. The shallowness of the contrition in

this case is shown by two things,--the request to Samuel to pray for

them, and the boon which they begged him to ask, that we die not.' They

had better have prayed for themselves, and they had better have asked

for strength to cleave to Jehovah. They were like Simon Magus cowering

before Peter, and beseeching him, Pray ye for me to the Lord, that none

of the things which ye have spoken may come upon me.' That is not the

voice of true repentance, the godly sorrow' which works healing and

life, but that of the sorrow of the world which worketh death.' The

real penitent will press the closer to the forgiving Father, and his

cry will be for purity even more than for pardon.

II. Samuel's closing words are tender, wise, and full of great truths.

He begins with encouragement blended with reiteration of the people's

sin. It is not safe for a forgiven man to forget his sin quickly. The

more sure he is that God has forgotten, the more careful he should be

to remember it, for gratitude, humility and watchfulness. But it should

never loom so large before him as to shut out the sunshine of God's

love, for no fruits of goodness will ripen in character without that

light. It is a great piece of practical wisdom always to keep one's

forgiven sin in mind, and yet not to let it paralyse hopefulness and

effort. Ye have indeed done all this evil, . . . yet turn not aside

from following Jehovah.' That is a truly evangelical exhortation. The

memory of past failures is never to set the tune for future service.

Again, Samuel based the exhortation to whole-hearted service of Jehovah

on Jehovah's faithfulness and great benefits (vs. 22-24), It is

suicidal folly to turn away from Him who never turns away from us; it

is black ingratitude, as well as suicidal folly, to refuse to serve Him

whose mercies encompass us. That divine good pleasure, which has no

source but in Himself, flows out like an artesian well, unceasing. His

nature and property' is to love. His past is the prophecy of His

future. He will always be what He has been, and always do what He has

done. Therefore we need not fear, though we change and are faithless.

He cannot deny Himself.' His revealed character would be dimmed if He

abandoned a soul that clung to Him. So our faith should, in some

measure, match His faithfulness, and we should build firmly on the firm

foundation.

III. Samuel answers the people's request for his prayers with a wise

word, full of affection, and also full of dignity and warning, all the

more impressive because veiled. He promises his continued intercession,

but he puts it as a duty which he owes to God rather than to them only,

and he thus sufficiently asserts his God-appointed office. He promises

to do more than pray for them; namely, to continue as their ethical and

religious guide, which they had not asked him to be. That at once makes

his future position in the monarchy clear. He is still the prophet,

though no longer the judge, and, as the future was to show, he has to

direct monarch as well as people. But it also hints to the people that

his prayers for them will be of little avail unless they listen to his

teaching. Whether a Samuel prays for us or not, if we do not listen to

the voices that bid us serve God, we shall be consumed.'

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SAUL REJECTED

Then came the word of the Lord unto Samuel, saying, 11. It repenteth Me

that I have set up Saul to be king: for he is turned back from

following Me, and hath not performed My commandments. And it grieved

Samuel; and he cried unto the Lord all night. 12. And when Samuel rose

early to meet Saul in the morning, it was told Samuel, saying, Saul

came to Carmel, and, behold, he set him up a place, and is gone about,

and passed on, and gone down to Gilgal. 13. And Samuel came to Saul:

and Saul said unto him, Blessed be thou of the Lord: I have performed

the commandment of the Lord. 14. And Samuel said, What meaneth then

this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen

which I hear? 15. And Saul said, They have brought them from the

Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the

oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lore thy God; and the rest we have utterly

destroyed. 16. Then Samuel said unto Saul, Stay, and I will tell thee

what the Lord hath said to me this night. And he said unto him, Say on.

17. And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast

thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed

thee king over Israel? 18. And the Lord sent thee on a journey, and

said, Go and utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight

against them until they be consumed. 19. Wherefore then didst thou not

obey the voice of the Lord, but didst fly upon the spoil, and didst

evil in the sight of the Lord? 20. And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I

have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord

sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly

destroyed the Amalekites. 21. But the people took of the spoil, sheep

and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly

destroyed, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. 22. And Samuel

said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,

as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than

sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23. For rebellion is as

the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry.

Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord, He hath also rejected

thee from being king.'--1 SAMUEL xv. 10-23.

Again the narrative takes us to Gilgal,--a fateful place for Saul,

There they made Saul king before the Lord'; there he had taken the

first step on his dark way of gloomy, proud self-will, down which he

was destined to plunge so far and fatally. There he had, in

consequence, received the message of the transference of the kingdom

from his house, though not from himself. Now, flushed with his victory

over Amalek, he has come there with his troops, laden with spoil. They

had made a swift march from the south where Amalek dwelt, passing by

Nabal's Carmel, where they had put up some sort of monument of their

exploit in a temper of vain-glory, very unlike the spirit which reared

the stone of help at Eben-ezer; and apparently they purpose sacrifices

and a feast. But Samuel comes into camp with no look of congratulation.

Probably the vigorous old man had walked that day from his home, some

fifteen miles off, and on the way seems to have picked up tidings of

Saul's victory and position, which ought to have reached him from the

king himself, and would have done so if Saul's conscience had been

clear. The omission to tell him was studied neglect, which revealed

much.

Samuel had cried unto the Lord all night,' if perchance the terrible

sentence might be reversed; and his cries had not been in vain, for

they had brought him into complete submission, and had nerved him to do

his work calmly, without a quiver or a pang of personal feeling, as

becomes God's prophet.

I. We must go back a step beyond this passage to understand it. Note,

first, the command which was disobeyed. The campaign against Amalek was

undertaken by express divine direction through Samuel's lips. It was

the delayed fulfilment of a sentence passed in the times of the

Conquest, but not executed then. The terrible old usages of that period

are brought into play again, and the whole nation with its possessions

is devoted'. The word explains the dreadful usage. There are two kinds

of devotion to God: that of willing, and that of unwilling, men; the

one brings life, the other, death. The massacre of the foul nations of

Canaan was thereby made a direct divine judgment, and removed wholly

from the region of ferocious warfare. No doubt, the whole plane of

morals in the earlier revelation is lower than that of the New

Testament. If Jesus has not taught a higher law than was given to them

of old time,' one large part of His gift to men disappears. The

wholesale destruction of babe and suckling' with the guilty makes us

shudder; and we are meant to feel the difference between the atmosphere

of that time and ours. But we are not meant to question the reality of

the divine command, nor His right to give it. He slays, and makes

alive. His judgments strike the innocent with the guilty. In many a

case, and often, the sin is one generation's, and the bitter fruit

another's. The destruction of Canaanites and Amalekites does not change

its nature because God used men to do it; and the question is not

whether the Israelites were fiercely barbarous in their warfare, but

whether God has the right of life and death. We grant all the

dreadfulness, and joyfully admit the distance between such acts and

Jesus Christ; but we recognise them as not incongruous with the whole

revealed character of the God who is justice as well as love, as

parallel in substance, though different in instrument, with many of His

dealings with men,--as the execution of righteous sentence on rank

corruption, and as sweetening the world by its removal. Most of the

difficulty and repugnance has been caused by forgetting that Israel was

but the sword, while the hand was God's.

II. Note the disobedience. Partial obedience is complete disobedience.

Saul and his men obeyed as far as suited them; that is to say, they did

not obey God at all, but their own inclinations, both in sparing the

good and in destroying the worthless. What was not worth carrying off

they destroyed,--not because of the command, but to save trouble. This

one fault seems but a small thing to entail the loss of a kingdom. But

is it so? It was obviously not an isolated act on Saul's part, but

indicated his growing impatience of the divine control, exercised on

him through Samuel. He was in a difficult position. He owed his kingdom

to the prophet; and the very condition on which he held it was that of

submission to Samuel's authority. No wonder that his elevation

quickened the growth of his masterfulness and gloomy, impetuous

self-will,--traits in his character which showed themselves very early

in his reign! No wonder either that such a king, held in

leading-strings by a prophet, should chafe! The more insignificant the

act in itself, the more significant it may be as a flag of revolt.

Disobedience which will not do a little thing is great disobedience.

Nor was this the first time that Saul had kicked,' like another Saul,

against the pricks,' Gilgal had seen a previous instance of his

impetuous self-assertion, masked by apparent deference; and the

inference is fair that the interval between the two pieces of rebellion

had been of a piece with them. Trivial acts, especially when repeated,

show deep-seated evil. There may be only a coil of the snake visible,

but that betrays the presence of the slimy folds, though they are

covered from sight among the leaves. The tiny shoot of a plant, peeping

above the ground, does not augur that the roots are short; they may run

for yards. Nor can any act be called small, of which the motive is

disregard of God's plain command: He that is unjust in the least is

unjust also in much.' Saul had never much religion. He had never heard

of Samuel till that day when he came to consult him about the asses. It

was a wonder to his acquaintances to find him among the prophets'; and

all his acts of worship have about them a smack of self, and an

exclusive regard to the mere externals of sacrifice, which imply a

shallow notion of religion and a spirit unsubdued by its deeper

influences.

Such a man habitually acts in disregard of God's will; and that is

great sin, though it be manifested in small acts. It is to be

remembered, too, that the excepting of the best of the spoil from the

general destruction, changed the whole character of the transaction,

and brought it down from the level of a solemn act of divine justice,

of which Saul and his army were the executors by divine mandate, to

that of a mere cattle-lifting foray, in which they were but thieves for

their own gain. The mingling of personal advantage with any sort of

service of God, ruins the whole, and turns it into mere selfishness.

Samuel, in verse 19, puts the two sides of this evil in the sight of

the Lord' as being disobedience and swooping down on the booty, like

some bird of prey.

III. Note Saul's excuses. Throughout the whole interview he plays a

sorry part, and is evidently cowed by the hated authority and

personality of the old man; while Samuel, on his side, is curt, stern,

and takes the upper hand, as becomes God's messenger. The relative

positions of the two men are the normal ones of their offices, and

explain both Saul's revolt and the chronic impatience of kings at the

interference of prophets. Here we have Saul coming to meet Samuel with

affected heartiness and welcome, and with the bold lie, I have

performed the commandment of the Lord.' That is more than true

obedience is quick to say. If Saul had done it, he would have been

slower to boast of it. Those vessels yield the most sound that have the

least liquor.' He doth protest too much'; and the protestation comes

from an uneasy conscience. Or did he, like a great many other men who

have no deep sense of the sanctity of every jot and tittle of a divine

law, please himself with the notion that it was enough to keep it

approximately, in the spirit' of the precept, without slavish obedience

to the letter'? In a later part of the interview (v. 20) he insists

that he has obeyed, and tries to prove it by dwelling on the points in

which he did so, and gliding lightly over the others.

Samuel had reason to believe the sheep and oxen above Saul'; and there

is a tone of almost contempt for the shuffling liar in his quiet

question: What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears,

and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?' There was no answering that;

so Saul shifts his ground without a blush or a moment's hesitation. The

people spared.' It is a new character for him to appear in,--that of a

weak ruler who cannot keep his unruly men in order! Had he tried to

restrain them? If he had, and had failed, he was not fit to be a king.

If he had not, he was a coward to shift the blame on to them. How ready

men are to vilify themselves in some other direction, in order to

escape the consciousness of sin, which God is seeking to force home on

them! No doubt the people were very willing to have a finger in the

affair; but so was he. And if the cattle was their share, Agag, who

could be held to ransom, was his; and the arrangement suited all round.

As to the purpose of sacrificing at Gilgal, perhaps that was true; but

if it were, no doubt the same process of selection, which had destroyed

the worthless and kept the best, would have been repeated; and the net

result would have been a sacrifice of the least valuable, and the

survival of the fittest' in many a pasture and stall.

But note Saul's attitude towards Jehovah, betrayed by him in that one

word: the Lord thy God,' No wonder that he had been content with a

partial and perfunctory obedience, if he had no closer sense of

connection with God than that! There is almost a sneer in it, too, as

if he had said, What needs all this fuss about saving the cattle? You

should be pleased; for this Jehovah, with whom you profess to have

special communication, will be honoured with sacrifice, and you will

share in the feast.' If the words do not mean abjuring Jehovah, they go

very near it, and, at all events, betray the shallowness of Saul's

religion. Samuel, in his answer, reminds him of his early modesty and

self-distrust, and of the source of his elevation. He then sweeps away

the flimsy cobwebs of excuses, by the curt repetition of the plain,

dreadful terms of Saul's commission, and then flashes out the piercing

question, like a sword, Wherefore then didst thou not?' The reminder of

past benefits, and the reiteration of the plain injunctions which have

been broken, are the way to cut through the poor palliations which men

wrap around their sins.

It speaks of a very obstinate and gloomy determination that, in answer,

Saul should reiterate his protestation of having done as he was bid. He

doggedly says over again all that he had said before, unmoved by the

prophet's solemn words. He is steeling his heart against reproof; and

there is only one end to that. Sin unacknowledged, after God has

disclosed it, is doubly sin. The heart that answers the touch of God's

rebukes by sullenly closing more tightly on its evil, is preparing

itself for the blow of the hammer which will crush it. He that being

often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and

that without remedy.' Let us beware of meeting God's prophet with

shuffling lies about our obedience, and of opposing to the words which

are loving though they pierce, the armour of impenetrable

self-righteousness and conceit.

IV. Note the punishment. To the vain talk about honouring God by

sacrifice, Samuel opposes the great principle which was the special

message committed to every prophet in Israel, and which was repeated

all through its history, side by side with the divinely appointed

sacrificial system. In the intensity of his spiritual emotion, Samuel

speaks in lyric strains, in the measured parallelism which was the

Hebrew dress of poetry, and gives forth in words which will live for

ever' the great truth that God delights in obedience more than in

sacrifice. Whilst, on the one hand, he lifts the surrender of the will,

and the consequent submission of the life, high above all mere ritual,

on the other hand, by the same process, he sinks the rebellion of the

will and the stubbornness of the nature, unsubdued either by kindness

or threats, as Saul was showing his to be, to the level of actual

idolatry.

Rebellion is divination,

And stubbornness is idols and teraphim.'

Then comes the stern sentence of rejection. Why was Saul thus

irrevocably set aside? Was it not a harsh punishment for such a crime?

As we have already remarked, Saul's act is not to be judged as an

isolated deed, but as the outcome of a deep tendency in him, which

meant revolt from God. It was not because of the single act, but

because of that which it showed him to be, that he was set aside. The

sentence is pronounced, not because thou didst spare Amalek,' but

because thou didst reject the word of the Lord.' Further, it is to be

remembered that the punishment was but the carrying out of his act. His

own hand had cut the bond between him and God, and had disqualified

himself for the office which he filled. Saul had said, I will reign by

myself.' God said, Be it so! By thyself thou shalt reign.' For the

consequence of his deposition was not outward change in his royalty.

David indeed was anointed but in secret, so Samuel consented to honour

Saul before the people. All the external difference was that Samuel

never saw him again, and he was relieved from the incubus of the

prophet's interference'; that is to say, he ceased to be God's king,

and became a phantom, ruling only by his own will and power, as he had

wished to do. How profound may be the difference while all externals

remain unchanged! When we set up ourselves as our own lords, and shake

off God's rule, we cast away His sanction and help in all the deeds of

our self-will, however unaltered their outward appearance may remain.

But God left him to walk in his own ways, and be filled with the fruit

of his own devices,' by no irrevocable abandonment, however the decree

of rejection from the kingship was irrevocable. The gates of repentance

stood open for him; and the very sentence that came stern and laconic

from Samuel's lips, rightly accepted, might have drawn him in true

penitence to a forgiving God. His subsequent confession was rejected

because it expressed no real contrition; and the worship which he

proceeded to offer, without the sanction of the prophet's presence, was

as unreal as his protestation of obedience, and showed how little he

had learned the lesson of the great words, To obey is better than

sacrifice.'

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THE SHEPHERD-KING

And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt them mourn for Saul,

seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel! fill thine horn

with oil, and go, I will send thee to Jesse the Beth-lehemite: for I

have provided Me a king among his sons. 2. And Samuel said, How can I

go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer

with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord. 3. And call

Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and

thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee. 4. And Samuel did

that which the Lord spake, and came to Beth-lehem. And the elders of

the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably? 5.

And he said, Peaceably: I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord: sanctify

yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice. And he sanctified Jesse

and his sons, and called them to the sacrifice. 6. And it came to pass,

when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the

Lord's anointed is before him. 7. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look

not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have

refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on

the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. 8. Then

Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said,

Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 9. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass

by. And he said, Neither hath the Lord chosen this. 10. Again, Jesse

made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto

Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. 11. And Samuel said unto Jesse,

Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the

youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto

Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come

hither. 12. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and

withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the Lord

said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. 13. Then Samuel took the horn

of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the Spirit

of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel rose up,

and went to Ramah.'--1 SAMUEL xvi. 1-13.

The chief purpose in these verses is to bring out that the choice of

David was purely God's. The most consummate art could have taken no

better way of heightening the effect of his first appearance than that

adopted in this perfectly unartificial story, which leads us up a long

avenue to where the shepherd-boy stands. First, we have Samuel, with

his regrets and objections; then Jesse with his seven stalwart sons;

and at last, when expectation has been heightened by delay and by the

minute previous details, the future king is disclosed,--a stripling

with his ruddy locks glistening with the anointing oil, and his lovely

eyes. We shall best catch the spirit by simply following the letter of

the story.

I. We have Samuel and his errand to Bethlehem. After that sad day at

Gilgal, he and Saul met no more, though their homes were but a few

miles apart, and it must have been difficult to avoid each other.

Samuel yearned over the man whom he had learned to love, and it must

have been pain to him to see the shattering of the vessel which he had

formed. However natural his mourning, and however indicative of his

sweet nature, it was wrong, because it showed that he had not yet

reconciled himself to God's purpose, though his conduct obeyed. The

mourning which submits while it weeps, and which interferes with no

duty, is never rebuked by God. He never says,' How long dost thou

mourn?' unless sorrow has deepened into accusation of His providence,

or tears have blinded us to the duty that ensues. But the true cure for

overmuch sorrow is work, and, for vain regrets after vanished good, the

welcome to the new good which God ever sends to fill the empty place.

His resources are not exhausted because one man has failed. There are

as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Saul has been

rejected, but a king shall be found; and Samuel is to dry his tears and

anoint him. He evidently had no thought of a successor to Saul till

this command came; and when it comes, how little it tells him! He gets

light enough for the next step, but no more. That is always God's way.

Duty opens by degrees, and the way to see farther ahead is to go as far

as we see.

Samuel's sorrow and the incomplete command show plainly that he was but

an instrument. At every step the view is confuted which makes him a

far-seeing statesman who inaugurated and carried through a peaceful

revolution. The history, which is our only source, tells another story,

and makes God the actor, and the prophet only a tool in His hands. If

we cut the supernatural out of the story, the fragments do not hang

together, and no reason is forthcoming why they should be any more true

than are the rejected pieces. Samuel does not show to advantage in

either of the two things mentioned about him here. In neither was he

true to his early vow, Speak, for Thy servant heareth.' But there was

much reason for his fear, if once God was left out of the account; for

Saul's ever-wakeful suspicion had become a disease, and it was not

wonderful that he should be on the watch for any act which looked like

putting the sentence of deposition into effect. If ever a man lived

with a sword hanging by a hair over him, it was this unhappy king, who

knew that he was dethroned, and did not know when or by whom the divine

rejection would be made visible to all men. But Samuel had faced worse

dangers without a murmur; and no doubt his alarm now, which makes him

venture all but flatly to refuse to obey, indicates that, to some

extent, he had lost his hold of God by his indulgence in his sorrow. If

he had been true to his high calling, he would have filled his horn,'

and gone on God's errand, careless of a hundred Sauls or a hundred

deaths. But it is easy for us, who have never perilled anything for

obedience, to sit in judgment on him. Wherein thou judgest another,

thou condemnest thyself.' God judges him mercifully, and provides a

shelter for his weakness, which he should not have needed. To hide his

true errand behind the cloak of the sacrifice was second-best, and only

permitted in consideration of his fear which had a touch of sin in it.

He was not, at the moment, up to treading the heroic plain path; and

God opened an easier one for him. It is sometimes allowable to use an

avowed purpose to conceal the real one, but it is a permission which

should be very sparingly used.

II. We have Samuel at Bethlehem, with Jesse and his sons. An old man is

suddenly seen coming up the hill to the gate of the little city on

foot, driving or leading a heifer, and carrying a horn in his hand. In

such humble fashion did the prophet travel; but reverential awe met

him, and his long years of noble service surrounded him as with a halo.

Apparently, Bethlehem had not been included in his usual circuits, and

the village elders were somewhat scared by his sudden appearance. Their

question may give a glimpse into the severity which Samuel sometimes

had to show, and is a strange testimony to the reality of his power:

Comest thou peaceably?' One old man was no very formidable assailant of

a village, even if he did not come with friendly intent; but, if he is

recognised as God's messenger, his words are sharper than any two-edged

sword, and his unarmed hand bears weapons mighty to pull down

strongholds.' Why should the elders have thought that he came with a

rod'? Because they knew that they and their fellow-villagers deserved

it. If men were not dimly conscious of sin, they would not be afraid of

God's messenger or of God.

The narrative does not tell whether or not the sacrifice preceded the

review of Jesse's sons. Probably it did, and the interval between it

and the feast was occupied in the interview. It is evident that Samuel

kept the reason of his wish to see Jesse's sons to himself; for

disclosure would have brought about the danger which he was so anxious

to avoid. It appears, too, from verse 13, that only the family of Jesse

were present. So we have to fancy the wondering little cluster of burly

husbandmen with their father surrounding the prophet, and: one by one,

bracing themselves to meet his searching gaze. Again the choice is

emphatically represented as God's, by the mention of Samuel's hasty

conclusion, from the look of the eldest, that he was the man. Had not

Samuel had enough of kings of towering stature? Strange that he should

have been in such a hurry to fix on a second edition of Saul! The most

obedient waiters on God sometimes outrun His intimations, and they

always go wrong when they do. Samuel has to learn two lessons, as he is

bidden to repress the too quick thought: one, that he is not choosing,

but only registering God's choice; and one, that the qualifications for

God's king are inward, not bodily. In these old days, the world's

monarchs had to be men of thews and sinews, for power rested on mere

brute force: but God's chosen had to rule, not by the strength of his

own arm, but by leaning on God's. The genius of the kingdom determined

the principle of selection of its king. Samuel does not again attempt

to forecast the choice; but he lets the other six pass, and, hearing no

inward voice from God, tells Jesse, as it would seem, that the Lord has

not chosen them for whatsoever mysterious purpose was in His mind.

III. We have the Lord's chosen.' Samuel was staggered by the apparent

failure of his errand. God had told him that he had provided a king

from this family, and now they had passed in review before him, and

none was chosen. Again he is made to feel his own impotence, and his

question, Are here all thy children?' has a touch of bewilderment in

it. God seldom shows us His choice at first; and both in thought and

practice we get at the precious and the true by a process of exclusion,

having often to reject seven' before we find in some all-but-forgotten

eighth' that which we seek. David's insignificance in Jesse's eyes was

such that his father would never have remembered his existence but for

the question, and his answer is a kind of assurance to the prophet that

he need not take the trouble to see the boy, for he will never do for

whatever he may have in view. His youth and occupation put him out of

the question. We know, from the other parts of his story, that his

brothers had no love for him; nor does his father seem to have had

much. Probably the lad had the usual lot of genius,--to grow up among

uncongenial, commonplace people, understanding him little, and liking

him less. It is a hard school; but where it does not sour, it makes

strong men. His solitary shepherd life taught him many precious

lessons, and, at any rate, gave him the priceless gift of solitude,

which is the nurse of poetry, heroism, and religion. The glorious

night-piece in Psalm viii., and its companion day-piece in Psalm xix.,

may bear the impress of the shepherd life; which is idealised and

sanctified for ever in the immortal sweetness of Psalm xxiii. There

were many worse schools for the future king than a solitary shepherd's

life on the bare hills round Bethlehem.

The delay of the feast and the pause of idle waiting heighten the

expectation with which we look for David's coming. When he does come,

what a bright young figure is lovingly painted for us! He is ruddy, and

withal fair of eyes, and goodly to look upon,'--of fair complexion,

with golden hair (rare among these swarthy Orientals), and with

lustrous poet's eyes. What a contrast to Saul's grim face and figure,--

like a sunbeam streaming athwart a thunder-cloud seamed with its own

lightning! Silently the divine voice spoke, and silently, as it would

seem, Samuel poured the oil on the boy's bowed curls. No word of the

purpose escaped his lips, and the awestruck youth was left to wonder

for what high destiny he was chosen. One can fancy the looks of his

brothers as they bitterly watched the anointing with hearts full of

envy, contempt, and rage. I Samuel xvii. 28 shows what they felt to

David.

What was the use of this enigmatical anointing for an undisclosed

purpose? It is Samuel's last act, and his last appearance, except for

the mention of David's flight to him from the court of Saul, and that

weird scene of Saul prophesying and lying naked before Samuel and David

for a day and a night. It was therefore the solemn final act of the

prophet,--transferring the monarchy; but it was for David the beginning

of his training for the throne, in two ways, The Spirit of the Lord

came upon David from that day forward.' There was an actual

communication of divine gifts fitting him for his unknown office, and

he was conscious of a new spirit stirring in him. Beside this, the

consciousness of a call to unknown tasks would mature him fast, and

bring graver thoughts, humbler sense of weakness, and clinging trust in

God who had laid the burden on him; and the necessity for repressing

his dreams of the future, in order to do his obscure present duties,

would add patience and self-control to his youthful ardour. What a

whirl of thoughts he carried back to his flock, and how welcome would

the solitude be!

The great lesson here is the one so continually reiterated in

Scripture, from Isaac downwards, that God chooses the weak things of

the world to confound the things that are mighty,' and thereby

magnifies both the sovereign freedom of His choice and the power of His

Spirit, which takes the stripling from the sheepcotes and qualifies him

to be the antagonist of the grim Saul, and the king of Israel. There

are subsidiary lessons, especially for young and ardent souls confined

for the present to lowly tasks, and feeling some call to something

higher in a dim future. Patience, the faithful doing of to-day's

trivial tasks, the habit of self-repression, the quiet trust in God who

opens the way in due time,--these, and such like, were the signs that

David was called to a throne, and that God's Spirit was preparing him

for it. They are the virtues which will best prepare us for whatever

the future may have in store for us, and will be in themselves abundant

reward, whether they draw after them a high position, which is a heavy

burden, or, more happily, leave us in our sheltered obscurity.

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THE VICTORY OF UNARMED FAITH

And David said to Saul, Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy

servant will go and fight with this Philistine. 33. And Saul said to

David, Thou art not able to go against this Philistine to fight with

him: for thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth. 34.

And David said unto Saul, Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and

there came a lion and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock; 35. And

I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth:

and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him,

and slew him. 36. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear: and this

uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied

the armies of the living God. 37. David said moreover, The Lord that

delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the

bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine. And Saul

said unto David, Go, and the Lord be with thee. 38. And Saul armed

David with his armour, and he put an helmet of brass upon his head;

also he armed him with a coat of mail. 39. And David girded his sword

upon his armour, and he assayed to go; for he had not proved it. And

David said unto Saul, I cannot go with these; for I have not proved

them. And David put them off him. 40. And he took his staff in his

hand, and chose him five smooth stones out of the brook, and put them

in a shepherd's bag which he had, even in a scrip; and his sling was in

his hand: and he drew near to the Philistine. 41. And the Philistine

came on and drew near unto David; and the man that bare the shield went

before him. 42. And when the Philistine looked about, and saw David, he

disdained him: for he was but a youth, and ruddy, and of a fair

countenance. 43. And the Philistine said unto David, Am I a dog, that

thou comest to me with staves? And the Philistine cursed David by his

gods. 44. And the Philistine said to David, Come to me, and I will give

thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field.

45. Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword,

and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of

the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast

defied. 46. This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I

will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the

carcases of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the

air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know

that there is a God in Israel. 47. And all this assembly shall know

that the Lord saveth not with sword and spear: for the battle is the

Lord's, and He will give you into our hands. 48. And it came to pass,

when the Philistine arose, and came and drew nigh to meet David, that

David hasted, and ran toward the army to meet the Philistine. 49. And

David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it,

and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his

forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth. 50. So David

prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and smote

the Philistine, and slew him; but there was no sword in the hand of

David. 51. Therefore David ran, and stood upon the Philistine, and took

his sword, and drew it out of the sheath thereof, and slew him, and cut

off his head therewith. And when the Philistines saw their champion was

dead, they fled.'--1 SAMUEL xvii. 32-51.

The scene of David's victory has been identified in the present Wady

Es-Sunt, which still possesses one of the terebinth-trees which gave it

its name of Elah.' At that point it is about a quarter of a mile wide,

and runs nearly east and west. In the centre is a deep trench or

gulley, the sides and bed of which are strewn with rounded and

water-worn pebbles.' This is the valley,' or rather ravine' of verse 3

of this chapter, which is described by a different word from that for

vale' in verse 2--the one meaning a much broader opening than the

other--and from it came the five smooth stones.' Notice the minute

topographical accuracy, which indicates history, not legend. The

pebble-bed may supply a missile to hit the modern giant' of sceptical

criticism, who boasts much after Goliath's fashion.

The two armies lay looking at each other across the valley, with

occasional skirmishes; and for forty days (probably a round number)

Goliath paraded on his own, the south, side of the gulley, shouting out

his taunts and challenge with a voice like a bull. Many a similar scene

in classical and mediaeval warfare confirms the truth of the picture,

so unlike modern battles. The story is, for all time, the example of

the victory of unarmed faith over the world's utmost might. It is in

little the history of the Church and the type of all battles for God.

It is a pattern for the young especially. The youthful athlete leaps

into the arena, and overcomes, not because of his own strength, but

because he trusts in God.

I. Note the glowing youthful enthusiasm which dares the conflict. When

the Spirit of the Lord left Saul, his courage seems to have gone too,

and he is cowed, like the rest, by Goliath. His interview with David

shows him as timid and unlike his former self, when he dashed at Nahash

and any odds. Now he is hardly to be roused, even by David's contagious

boldness, and is full of objections and precautions. The temper of the

two, as they front each other in Saul's tent, shows that the one has

lost, and the other received, the Spirit which strengthens. David has

become the encourager, and his cheery words bring some hopefulness to

the gloomy, faint-hearted king. The Septuagint has a variant reading in

verse 32, which brings this out and suits the context, Let not my

lord's heart fail.' But, whether this be adopted or no, David appears

as quite unaffected by the terror which had unmanned the army, and as

bringing a buoyant disregard of the enemy, like a reviving breeze. It

was not merely youthful daring, nor foolish under-estimation of the

danger, which prompted his stimulating words. The ring of true faith is

in them, and they show us how we may surround ourselves with an

atmosphere which will keep prevailing faint-heartedness off us, and

make us, like Gideon's fleece, impervious to the chill mists of

faithless fear which saturate all around. He who trusts in God should

be as a pillar of fire, burning bright in the darkness of terror, and

making a rallying point for weaker hearts. When panic has seized

others, the Christian soul has the more reason for courage. David

conquered the temptation to share in the general cowardice, before he

conquered Goliath, and perhaps the former fight was the worse of the

two.

While David is the embodiment of the courage of faith, Saul embodies

worldly wisdom and calculating prudence. A touch of tenderness blends

with his attempt to dissuade the lad from the unequal conflict. He

speaks of probabilities, and, like all such calculation, his results

are quite right, only that he has not taken all the forces into

account, and the omission vitiates the conclusion. It is quite true

that David is but a youth, and Goliath a giant and a veteran; but is

that all that is to be said? If it be, then the lad cannot fight the

Philistine bully; but if Saul has made the small omission of leaving

out God, that makes a difference. The same mistake is constantly made

still, and so the victories of faith are a constant surprise to the

world and to a worldly Church. David's eager story of his fights with

wild beasts is meant both to answer Saul's objection on his own ground,

by showing him that, youth as the speaker was, he had proved his power,

and still more to supply the lacking element in the calculation. So he

tells, first, how I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew

him,' and then at the end brings in the true ground of his confidence:

The Lord that delivered me . . . He will deliver.' As Thomas Fuller

says, He made an experimental syllogism, and from most practical

premises (major a lion, minor a bear), inferred the direct conclusion

that God would give him victory over Goliath. Faith has the right thus

to argue from the past to the future, because it draws from God whose

resources and patience are equally inexhaustible. An echo of the words

comes from Paul's Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth

deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver.' There is infinite

pathos in Saul's parting blessing. The Lord be with thee!' is spoken as

if from the consciousness that the Lord had left him, and that his day

for going into battle with the assurance of His help was gone for ever.

If that softened mood had lasted, how different his future might have

been! If we modestly and boldly show the power of faith in our lives,

we may kindle yearnings in some gloomy hearts, that would lead them to

peace, if followed out.

II. The equipment of faith. Saul meant to honour as well as to secure

David by dressing him in his own royal attire, and by encumbering him

by the help of sword and helmet. And David was willing to be so fitted

out, for it is no part of the courage of faith to disdain any outward

helps. But he soon found that he could not move freely in the

unaccustomed armour, and flung it off, like a wise man. His motive was

partly common sense, which told him not to choose weapons that his

antagonist could handle better than he; and partly reliance on God,

which told him that he was safer with no armour but his shepherd's

dress and with only his sling in his hand. So there he stands, drawn

for us with wonderful vividness, in one hand his staff, in the other

his sling, both familiar and often used, and by his side the simple

wallet which had held his frugal meal, and now received the smooth

pebbles that he picked up as he passed the gulley to the Philistine

side of the valley.

How graphically the contrast is drawn between him and Goliath, as the

latter conies forth swelling with his own magnificence, and preceded by

his shield-bearer! He was brass' all over; note the kind of amused

emphasis with which the word is repeated in the half-satirical and

marvellously lifelike portrait of him in verses 5-8; brass' here,

brass' there, brass' everywhere; and, not content with one shield

dangling at his back, he has a man to carry another in front of him as

he struts. David seems to have crossed the ravine, and to have come

close up to Goliath before he was observed; and then, with almost a

snort of contempt, the giant resents the insult of sending such a foe

to fight him with such weapons. Perhaps he was nearer the truth than he

thought, when he asked if he was a dog; and any stick will do, as the

proverb says, to beat that animal, especially if God guards the hand

that holds it.

The five smooth stones have become the symbol of the insignificant

means, in the world's estimate, which God uses in faithful hands to

slay the giants of evil. The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but

they are mighty. Faith unarmed is armed with more than triple steel,

and a sling in its hand is more fatal than a sword. Sometimes in

kindness and sometimes in malice, the world tempts us to fight evil

with its own weapons, and to put on its unfamiliar armour. The Church

as a whole, and individual Christians, have often been hampered, and

all but smothered, in Saul's harness. The more simply we keep ourselves

to the simple methods which the word of God enjoins, and to the simple

weapons which ought to be the easiest for a Christian, the more likely

shall we be to conquer. Goliath is not to be encountered with sword and

armour which is, after all, but a shabby copy of the tons of brass

which he wears, but he does not know what to make of the sling, and

does not see the stone till it crashes his skull in.

III. Note faith's anticipation of victory. The dialogue before the

battle has many parallels in classical times and among savage peoples.

Goliath's bluster is full of contempt of David and truculent

self-confidence. Its coarseness is characteristic,--he will make his

boyish antagonist food for vultures and jackals. It is exactly what a

bully would say. David's answer throbs with buoyant confidence, and

stands as a stimulating example of the temper in which God's soldiers

should go out to every fight, no matter against what odds. It fully

recognises the formidable armoury of the enemy,--sword for close

quarters, spear to thrust with, and javelin to fling from a distance,

every weapon that ingenuity could fashion and trained skill could

wield. Goliath was a walking arsenal, and little David took count of

his weapons as they clanked and flashed. It is no part of faith's

triumph to ignore the number and sharpness of the enemy's arms. But

faith sees them all, and keeps unterrified and unashamed of the poor

leathern sling and smooth stones. The unarmed hand which grasps God's

hand should never tremble; and he who can say I come . . . in the name

of the Lord of hosts,' has no need to be afraid of an army of Goliaths,

though each bristled with swords and spears like a porcupine.

The great name on which David's faith rested, the Lord of hosts,'

appears to have sprung into use in this epoch, and to have been one

precious fruit of its frequent wars. Conflict is blessed if it teaches

the knowledge of the unseen Commander who marshals not only men, but

all the forces of the universe and the armies of heaven, for the

defence of His servants and the victory of His own cause. The fulness

of the divine name is learned by degrees, as our needs impress the

various aspects of His character; and the revelation contained in this

appellation is the gift of that fierce and stormy time, a possession

for ever. He who defies the armies of Israel has to reckon with the

Lord of these armies, whose name proclaims at once His eternal,

self-originated, and self-sustained being, His covenant, His presence

with His earthly host, and the infinite ranks of obedient creatures who

are His soldiers and their allies. That is the Name' in the strength of

which we may set up our banners' and be sure of victory. Note how David

flings back Goliath's taunts in his teeth. He is sure that God will

conquer through him, and, though he has no sword, that he will somehow

hack the big head off; and that it is the host of the Philistines on

whom the vultures and jackals are to feed to-day.

His faith sees the victory before the battle is begun, and trusts, not

in his own weak power, but only in the name of the Lord.' Note, too,

the result which he expects--no glory for himself, though that came

unsought, when the shrill songs from the women of Israel met the

victors, but to all the world the proof that Israel had a God, and to

Israel (this assembly') the renewed lesson of their true weapons and of

their Almighty Helper. Such utter suppression of self is inseparable

from trust in God, and without it no soldier of His has a right to

expect victory. To fight in the name of the Lord' requires hiding our

own name. If we are really going to war for Him, and in His strength,

we ought to expect to conquer. Believe that you will be beaten, and you

will be. Trust to Him to make you more than conquerors,' and the trust

will bring about its own fulfilment.

IV. Observe the contrast in verse 48 between the slow movements of the

heavy-armed Philistine and the quick run of the shepherd, whose feet

were as hind's feet' (Psalm xviii. 33). Agility and confident alacrity

were both expressed. His feet were shod with the preparedness of

faith.' Observe, too, the impetuous brevity of the account in verse 49,

of the actual fall of Goliath. The short clauses, coupled by a series

of ands,' reproduce the swift succession of events, which ended the

fight before it had begun; and one can almost hear the whiz of the

stone as it crashes into the thick head, so strangely left unprotected

by all the profusion of brass that clattered about him. The vulnerable

heel of Achilles and the unarmed forehead of Goliath illustrate the

truth, ever forgotten and needing to be repeated, that, after all

precautions, some spot is bare, and that there is no armour against

fate.'

The picture of the huge man-mountain' fallen upon his face to the

earth, a huddled heap of useless mail, recalls the words of a psalm,

When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up

my flesh, they stumbled and fell' (Psalm xxvii. 2). Is it fanciful to

hear in that triumphant chant an echo of Goliath's boast about giving

his flesh to the fowls and the beasts, and a vision of the braggart as

he tottered and lay prostrate? Observe, too, the contemptuous

reiteration of the Philistine,' which occurs six times in the four

verses (48-51). National feeling speaks in that. There is triumph in

the sarcastic repetition of the dreaded name in such a connection. This

was what one of the brood had got, and his fate was an omen of what

would befall the rest. The champion of Israel, the soldier of God,

standing over the dead Philistine, all whose brazen armour had been

useless and his brazen insolence abased, and sawing off his head with

his own sword, was a prophecy for the Israel of that day, and will be a

symbol till the end of time of the true equipment, the true temper, and

the certain victory, of all who, in the name of the Lord of hosts, go

forth in their weakness against the giants of ignorance, vice, and sin.

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.'

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A SOUL'S TRAGEDY

And David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself

wisely: and Saul set him over the men of war; and he was accepted in

the sight of all the people, and also in the sight of Saul's servants.

6. And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the

slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of

Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy,

and with instruments of musick. 7. And the women answered one another

as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his

ten thousands. 8. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased

him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to

me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the

kingdom? 9. And Saul eyed David from that day and forward. 10. And it

came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon

Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played

with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's

hand. 11. And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David

even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice.

12. And Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him, and

was departed from Saul. 13. Therefore Saul removed him from him, and

made him his captain over a thousand; and he went out and came in

before the people. 14. And David behaved himself wisely in all his

ways; and the Lord was with him. 15. Wherefore, when Saul saw that he

behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him. 16. But all Israel

and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them.'--1

SAMUEL xviii. 5-16.

Verse 5 anticipates verses 13-16. It is the last verse of a section

which interrupts the even flow of the story, and which is absent from

the Septuagint. Verse 6 follows immediately on xvii. 54 in that

version. Taking that verse as our starting-point, we have three stages

in Saul's growing hatred and awe of the young champion, and of David's

growing influence and reputation. It is deeply tragic to watch the

gradual darkening of the once bright light, side by side with the

irresistible increase in brilliance of the new star. He must increase,

but I must decrease,' became Saul's bitter conviction; but instead of

meekly accepting the necessity, his gloomy spirit struggled against it,

like stormy waves against a breakwater, and, like them, was shivered

into foam in the vain effort.

I. The first stage was Saul's jealousy of David's fame as a warrior.

The returning victorious army was met, in Oriental fashion, by a

triumphal chorus of women, with their shrill songs, accompanied by the

dissonant noises which do duty for music to Eastern ears. The words of

their chant were startlingly and ominously plain-spoken, and became

more emphatic and insulting in Saul's ears, because they were sung by

two answering bands, one of which rang out, Saul hath slain his

thousands,' while the other overtopped them by pealing out still more

loudly and exultantly, And David his ten thousands.' To be brought into

comparison with this unknown stripling was bitter enough, but to be

used as a foil to set off his superiority was too much to be borne.

There are few men, holding high places in any walk of life, who could

have stood such a comparison without wincing. Suppose a great soldier

in our day, coming home from a successful campaign, and having his

prowess dimmed in every newspaper by the praises lavished on a young

lieutenant who had done some brave feat that caught the public fancy--

would he be likely to be in a very amiable mood towards either the

singers or the object of their triumphal songs? Do great authors

rejoice in the rising of young reputations that dim theirs? or do great

orators smile when some boy' takes the public ear more than they do?

Poor Saul had to drink the bitter cup, which all who love the sweet

draught of popular applause have sooner or later to taste; and we need

not think him a monster of badness because he found it bitter.

It will be more to the purpose that we take care lest we do the very

same thing in our little lives and humble spheres; for envy and

jealousy of those who threaten to out-shine, or in any way to out-do,

us is not confined to people in high places or with great reputations.

The roots of them are in us all, and the only way to keep them from

growing up rank is to think less of our reputation and more of our

duty, to count it a very small matter what men think of us, and the

all-important matter what God thinks.

Saul was moved, too, by the consciousness that he had been really

deposed by Jehovah, and was only a phantom king, and, as his angry

soliloquy shows, what troubled him most in the women's song was that it

pointed to David as likely to come in and rob him, not only of glory,

but of the kingdom. Ever since Samuel had pronounced his rejection, his

uneasy eyes had been furtively scanning men for his possible

supplanter, and no wonder that his gloomy suspicions focussed

themselves on the gallant youth, who conquered men's hearts and made

women's tongues eloquent in his praise. Stormy and dark as Saul's

nature had become, and grave as had been his failure to be worthy of

the monarchy, one cannot but feel the infinite pathos and pity of his

life.

II. The second stage was the attempt on David's life. Verses 10 and 11,

which record it, are not in the Septuagint, and the narrative does run

more smoothly without them. But if they are retained, they show how the

moody suspicion with which Saul eyed David' came to a swift, murderous

climax. He stands as a terrible example of how suspicion and jealousy,

working in a nature utterly without self-control, transport it into the

wildest excesses. In the strange phraseology of verse 9, an evil spirit

from God' laid hold of him, dominating his personality. The writer of

this book felt that God was the ultimate cause of all things, and that

all beings were under His control; and his devout recognition of that

fact led him to the apparent paradox of tracing an evil spirit' to God.

But we must not be so startled as to overlook the truth that Saul had

prepared the fit abode for that evil spirit by his own indulgence in a

whirl of sinful passions and acts, and that these were punished by

their natural' consequence. Any man who lets his own baser nature have

full fling invites the devil. Saul had what would now be called a

paroxysm of insanity. But perhaps the modern medical phrase is not to

be preferred to the old scriptural one. The former is innocent of any

explanation of the fact which it designates, and it may possibly be

that insanity is sometimes, even now, possession.' At all events, since

science gives no explanation of it, and a great dim region of

consciousness is now being recognised,--subliminal,' to speak in the

new phraseology,--he is a bold man who ventures to deny that

possibility.

But be that as it may, what a striking picture is given of Saul, worn

with passion and swept away by ungovernable impulses, prophesying' or

raving' with wild gestures and uttering wilder sounds; and of David,

young, calm, giving forth melodies on his harp and songs from his lips,

that sought to soothe the paroxysms of fury. Browning has drawn the

picture in immortal words, which all who can should read. It has been

suggested that Saul did not cast' his spear, but only brandished it in

his fierce threat to pin David to the wall. But the youthful harper

would scarcely have avoided out of his presence' for a mere threat and

the flourish of a lance; and a man, raging mad and madly hostile, would

not be likely to waste breath in mere threats. The attempt was more

probably a serious one, and the spear, flung by an arm made stronger

than ever by insane hatred, quivered in the wall very near the lithe

athlete who had agilely escaped it. Envy, allowed to have its way,

becomes murderous. Let us suppress its beginning. A tiger pup can be

held in and its claws cut, but a full-grown tiger cannot.

III. The third stage is Saul's getting rid of David. The growing awe of

him is marked in verses 12 and 15, and the word in the latter verse is

stronger than that in the former. It is a pathetic picture of the

gradual creeping over a strong man of a nameless terror.

Ever-thickening folds of cold dread, like a wet mist, wrap a soul once

bright and energetic. And the reason is twofold: first, that God had

left that tempestuous, rebellious soul because it had left Him; and

second, that, in its desolate solitude, in which there was no trace of

softening or penitence, that lightning-riven soul knew that the

sunshine, which it had repelled, was now pouring on David. Saul's

suspicions were hardened into certainties. He was sure now that what

his jealousy had whispered, when the women chanted their chorus, was

grim fact. And he could but helplessly watch his supplanter's steady

advance in favour with men and God. The two processes of growing

darkness and growing light go on side by side in the two men, and each

makes the other more striking by contrast. Twice is it repeated that

Saul was in awe of David. Twice is it repeated that Jehovah was with

David, and that he behaved himself wisely,' which last statement

includes in the Hebrew word both the idea of prudence and that of

success. So, on the one hand, there is a steady growth in all good,

godly, and happy qualities and experiences; and on the other, a

tragical increase of darkness and gloom, godlessness and despair. And

yet Saul had begun so well! And Saul might have been what David was,--

companioned by God, prosperous, and the idol of his people. Two souls

stand side by side for a moment on the same platform, with the same

divine goodness and love encircling them, and the one steadily rises,

while the other steadily sinks. How awful are the endless possibilities

of progress in either direction that lie open for every soul of man!

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JONATHAN, THE PATTERN OF FRIENDSHIP

And David fled from Naioth in Ramah, and came and said before Jonathan,

What have I done? what is mine iniquity? and what is my sin before thy

father, that he seeketh my life? 2. And he said unto him, God forbid;

thou shalt not die: behold, my father will do nothing either great or

small, but that he will shew it me: and why should my father hide this

thing from me? it is not so. 3. And David sware moreover, and said, Thy

father certainly knoweth that I have found grace in thine eyes; and he

saith, Let not Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved: but truly, as

the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, there is but a step between me

and death. 4. Then said Jonathan unto David, Whatsoever thy soul

desireth, I will even do it for thee. 5. And David said unto Jonathan,

Behold, to-morrow is the new moon, and I should not fail to sit with

the king at meat: but let me go, that I may hide myself in the field

unto the third day at even. 6. If thy father at all miss me, then say,

David earnestly asked leave of me that he might run to Beth-lehem his

city: for there is a yearly sacrifice there for all the family. 7. If

he say thus, it is well; thy servant shall have peace: but if he be

very wroth, then be sure that evil is determined by him. 8. Therefore

thou shalt deal kindly with thy servant; for thou hast brought thy

servant into a covenant of the Lord with thee: notwithstanding, if

there be in me iniquity, slay me thyself; for why shouldest thou bring

me to thy father? 9. And Jonathan said, Far be it from thee: for if I

knew certainly that evil were determined by my father to come upon

thee, then would not I tell it thee? 10. Then said David to Jonathan,

Who shall tell me? or what if thy father answer thee roughly? 11. And

Jonathan said unto David, Come, and let us go out into the field. And

they went out both of them into the field. 12. And Jonathan said unto

David, O Lord God of Israel when I have sounded my father about

to-morrow any time, or the third day, and, behold, if there be good

toward David, and I then send not unto thee, and shew it thee; 13. The

Lord do so and much more to Jonathan: but if it please my father to do

thee evil, then I will shew it thee, and send thee away, that thou

mayest go in peace: and the Lord be with thee, as He hath been with my

father.'--1 SAMUEL xx. 1-13.

The friendship of Jonathan for David comes like a breath of pure air in

the midst of the heavy-laden atmosphere of hate and mad fury, or like

some clear fountain sparkling up among the sulphurous slag and barren

scoriae of a volcano. There is no more beautiful page in history or

poetry than the story of the passionate love of the heir to the throne

for the young champion, whom he had so much cause to regard as a rival.

What a proof of the victory of love over self is his saying, Thou shalt

be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'! (1 Samuel xxiii.

17). Truly did David sing in his elegy, Thy love to me was wonderful,

passing the love of women'; for in that old world, in which the

relations between the sexes had not yet received the hallowing and

refinement of Christian times, much of what is now chiefly found in

these was manifested in friendship, such as that of these two young

men. Jonathan is the foremost figure in it, and the nobility and

self-oblivion of his love are beautifully brought out, while David's

part is rather that of the loved than of the lover. The scene is laid

in Gibeah, where Saul kept his court, and to which all the persons of

the story seem to have come back from Samuel's house at Kamah. Saul's

strange subjugation to the hallowing influences of the prophet's

presence had been but momentary and superficial; and it had been

followed by a renewed outburst of the old hate, obvious to David's

sharpened sight, though not to Jonathan. In the interview between them,

David is pardonably but obviously absorbed in self, while Jonathan

bends all his soul to cheer and reassure his friend.

There are four turns in the conversation, in each of which David speaks

and Jonathan answers. David's first question presupposes that his

friend knows that his death is determined, and is privy to Saul's

thoughts. If he had been less harassed, he would have done Jonathan

more justice than to suppose him capable of knowing everything without

telling him anything; but fear is suspicious. He should have remembered

that, when Saul first harboured murderous purposes, Jonathan had not

waited to be asked, but had disclosed the plot to him, and perilled his

own life by his remonstrances with his father. He should have trusted

his friend. His question breathes consciousness of innocence of any

hostility to Saul, but unconsciously betrays some defect in his

confidence in Jonathan. The answer is magnanimous in its silence as to

that aspect of the question, though the subsequent story seems to imply

that Jonathan felt it. He tries to hearten David by strong assurances

that his life is safe. He does not directly contradict David's

implication that he knew more than he had told, but, without asserting

his ignorance, takes it for granted, and quietly argues from it the

incorrectness of David's suspicions. Incidentally he gives us, in the

picture of the perfect confidence between Saul and himself, an inkling

of how much he had to sacrifice to his friendship. Wild as was Saul's

fury when aroused, and narrow as had been his escape from it at an

earlier time (1 Samuel xiv. 44), there was yet love between them, and

the king made a confidant of his gallant eldest son. They were lovely

and pleasant in their lives.' However gloomy and savage in his

paroxysms Saul was, the relations between them were sweet. The most

self-introverted and solitary soul needs some heart to pour itself out

to, and this poor king found one in Jonathan. All the harder, then, was

the trial of friendship when the trusted son had to take the part of

the friend whom his father deemed an enemy, and had the pain of

breaking such close ties. How his heart must have been torn asunder! On

the one side was the lonely father who clung to him: on the other, the

hunted friend to whom he clung. It is a sore wrench when kindred are on

one side, and congeniality and the voice of the heart on the other. But

there are ties more sacred than those of flesh and blood; and the

putting of them second, which is sometimes needful in obedience to

earthly love or duty, is always needful if we would rightly entertain

our heavenly Friend.

Jonathan's soothing assurances did not satisfy David, and he sware' in

the earnestness of his conviction. David gives a very good reason for

his friend's ignorance, which he has at once believed, in the

suggestion that Saul had not taken him into his confidence, out of

tenderness to his feelings. Their friendship, then, was notorious, and,

indeed, was an element in Saul's dread of David, who seemed to have

some charm to steal hearts, and had bewitched both Saul's son and his

daughter, thus making a painful rift in the family unity. It does not

appear how David came to be so sure of Saul's designs. The incident at

Ramah might have seemed to augur some improvement in his mood; and

certainly there could have been no overt acts, or Jonathan could not

have disputed the suspicions. Possibly some whispers may have reached

David through his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, or in the course of his

attendance on the king, which he had now resumed, his quick eye may

have noticed ominous signs. At all events, he is so sure, that he makes

solemn attestation to his friend, and convinces him that, in the

picturesque phrase which has become so familiar, There is but a step

between me and death.' Such temper was scarcely in accordance with the

prophecies which went before on' him. If he had been walking by faith,

he would have called Samuel's anointing to mind, and have drawn

arguments from the victory over Goliath, for trust in victory over

Saul, as he had done for the former from that over the lion and the

bear. But faith does not always keep high-water mark, and we can only

too easily sympathise with this momentary ebb of its waters.

None the less is it true that David's terror was unworthy, and showed

that the strain of his anxious position was telling on his spirit, and

making him not only suspect his earthly friend, but half forget his

heavenly One. There was but a step between him and death; but, if he

had been living in the serenity of trust, he would have known that the

narrow space was as good as a thousand miles, and that Saul could not

force him across it, for all his hatred and power.

Jonathan does not attempt to alter his conviction and probably is

obliged to admit the justice of the explanation of his own ignorance

and the truth of the impression of Saul's purposes. But he does what is

more to the purpose; he pledges himself to do whatever David desires.

It is an unconditional desertion of his father and alliance with David;

it is the true voice of friendship or love, which ever has its delight

in knowing and doing the will of the beloved. It answers David's

thoughts rather than his words. He will not discuss any more whether he

or David is right; but, in any event, he is his friend's.

The touchstone of friendship is practical help and readiness to do what

the friend wishes. It is so in our friendships here, which are best

cemented so. It is so in the highest degree in our friendship with the

true Friend and Lover of us all, the sweetness and power of our

friendship with whom we do not know until we say, Whatsoever thou

desirest, I will do it,' and so lose the burden of self-will, and find

that He does for us what we desire when we make His desires our law of

conduct.

Secure of Jonathan's help, David proposed the stratagem for finding out

Saul's disposition, which had probably been in his mind all along. It

says more for his subtlety than for his truthfulness. With all his

nobility, he had a streak of true Oriental craft and stood on the moral

level of his times and country, in his readiness to eke out the lion's

skin with the fox's tail. It was a shrewd idea to make Saul betray

himself by the way in which he took David's absence; but a lie is a

lie, and cannot be justified, though it may be palliated, by the

straits of the liar. At the same time it is fair to remember the

extremity of David's danger and the morality of his age, in estimating,

not the nature of his action, but the extent of his guilt in doing it.

The same relaxation of the vigour of his faith which left him a prey to

fear, led him to walk in crooked paths, and the impartial narrative

tells of them without a word of comment. We have to form our own

estimate of the fitness of a lie to form the armour of a saint. The

proposal informs us of two facts,--the custom of having a feast for

three days at the new moon, and that of having an annual family feast

and sacrifice, neither of which is prescribed in the law. I do not here

deal with the grave question as to the date of the ceremonial law, as

affected by these and similar phenomena; but I may be allowed the

passing remark that the irregularities do not prove the non-existence

of the law, but may be accounted for by supposing that, in such

unsettled times, it had been loosely observed, and that many accretions

and omissions, some of them inevitable in the absence of a recognised

centre of worship, had crept in. That is a much less brilliant and much

more old-fashioned explanation than the new one, but perhaps it is none

the worse for that. This generation is fond of making originality' and

brilliancy' the tests of truth.

David's words in verse 8 have a touch of suspicion in them, in their

very appeal for kind treatment, in their reminder of the covenant' of

friendship, as if Jonathan needed either, and still more in the bitter

request to slay him himself instead of delivering him to Saul. He

almost thinks that Jonathan is in the plot, and means to carry him off

a prisoner. Note, too, that he does not say, We made a covenant,' but

Thou hast brought me into' it, as if it had been the other's wish

rather than his. All this was beneath true friendship, and it hurt

Jonathan, who next speaks with unusual emotion, beseeching David to

clear all this fog out of his heart, and to believe in the genuineness

and depth of his love, and in the frankness of his speech. True love is

not easily provoked,' is not soon angry, and his was true in spite of

many obstacles which might have made him as jealous as his father, and

in the face of misconstruction and suspicion. May we not think of a yet

higher love, which bears with our suspicions and faithless doubts, and

ever answers our incredulity by its gentle If it were not so, I would

have told you'?

David is not yet at the end of his difficulties, and next suggests, how

is he to know Saul's mind? Jonathan takes him out into the privacy of

the open country (they had apparently been in Gibeah), and there

solemnly calls God to witness that he will disclose his father's

purposes, whatever they are. The language is obscure and broken,

whether owing to corruption in the text, or to the emotion of the

speaker. In half-shaped sentences, which betray how much he felt his

friend's doubts, and how sincere he was, he invokes evil on himself if

he fails to tell all. He then unfolds his ingenious scheme for

conveying the information, on which we do not touch. But note the final

words of Jonathan,--that prayer, so pathetic, so unselfish in its

recognition of David as the inheritor of the kingdom that had dropped

from his own grasp, so sad in its clear-eyed assurance of his father's

abandonment, so deeply imbued with faith in the divine word, and so

resigned to its behests. Both in the purity of his friendship and in

the strength of his faith and submission, Jonathan stands here above

David, and is far surer than the latter himself is of his high destiny

and final triumph. It was hard for him to believe in the victory which

was to displace his own house, harder still to rejoice in it, without

one trace of bitterness mingling in the sweetness of his love, hardest

of all actively to help it and to take sides against his father; but

all these difficulties his unselfish heart overcame, and he stands for

all time as the noblest example of human friendship, and as not

unworthy to remind us, as from afar off and dimly, of the perfect love

of the Firstborn Son of the true King, who has loved us all with a yet

deeper, more patient, more self-sacrificing love. If men can love one

another as Jonathan loved David, how should they love the Christ who

has loved them so much! And what sacrilege it is to pour such treasures

of affection at the feet of dear ones here, and to give so grudgingly

such miserable doles of heart's love to Him!

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LOVE FOR HATE, THE TRUE QUID PRO QUO

And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the Lord

said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand,

that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David

arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily. 5. And it came to

pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had out off

Saul's skirt. 6. And he said unto his men, The Lord forbid that I

should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch

forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord. 7.

So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to

rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his

way. 8. David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried

after Saul, saying, My Lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him,

David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself, 9. And

David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold,

David seeketh thy hurt? 10. Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how

that the Lord had delivered thee to-day into mine hand in the cave: and

some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will

not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed.

11. Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my

hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not,

know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine

hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to

take it. 12. The Lord judge between me and thee, and the Lord avenge me

Of thee; but mine hand shall not be upon thee. 13. As saith the proverb

of the ancients, Wickedness proceedeth from the wicked: but mine hand

shall not be upon thee. 14. After whom is the king of Israel come out?

after whom dost thou pursue? after a dead dog, after a flea. 15. The

Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and thee, and see, and

plead my cause, and deliver me out of thine hand. 16. And it came to

pass, when David had made an end of speaking these words unto Saul,

that Saul said, Is this thy voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his

voice, and wept. 17. And he said to David, Thou art more righteous than

I; for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee

evil.'--1 SAMUEL xxiv. 4-17.

A sudden Philistine invasion had saved David, when hard pressed by

Saul, and had given him the opportunity of flight to the wild country

on the west of the Dead Sea, near the place where En-Gedi (the Fountain

of the Wild Goat') sparkles into light on the hill above the weird

lake. In these savage gorges Saul's three thousand men would be of

little use against the light-footed outlaw and his troop. The whole

district is seamed with ravines, and these are honeycombed with great

caverns, where dangerous outcasts still lurk and defy capture.

Travellers go into raptures over the beauty of some of these fairy

grottoes' draped with maiden-hair fern, cool and moist, and blessedly

dark after the fierce light outside. In some one of these the beautiful

story which makes our lesson occurred.

I. We have the scene in the cave. The interior would be black as night

to one looking inward with eyes fresh from the blinding glare of such

sunlight upon limestone, but it would hold a glimmering twilight for

one looking outward, with eyes accustomed to the gloom. David and his

men, keeping close to the walls and hiding behind angles, might well be

unobserved by Saul at the mouth, and probably never looking in at all.

How vividly the whispered eagerness of the outcasts round David is

reproduced! They think it would be tempting Providence' to let such a

chance slip. They put a religious varnish on their advice. It would be

almost impious not to kill Saul, for here was the hand of God evidently

fulfilling a prophecy! There may have been some unrecorded prediction

of the sort which they seem to quote; but more probably they are only

referring to David's designation to the crown, which they had come to

know. It never struck them as possible that it could seem good' to a

wise man not to cut his enemy's throat when he could do it without

danger to himself. So they would watch David stealing down quietly to

the place where the unconscious king was crouching, and getting close

behind him, knife in hand. How disgusted they must have been when the

blade, that flashed for a moment in the light at the cave's mouth, was

not buried in Saul's great back, but only hacked off the end of his

robe spread out behind him! No personal animosity was in David. However

he had been driven to consort with outlaws, and to live a kind of

freebooter's life, his natural sweetness was unspoiled, and was

reinforced by solemn veneration for the sanctity of the Lord's

anointing, which he reverenced all the more because himself had

received it. He clambered back to his disappointed men, and, as soon as

he was up in the dark again, his chivalry and his religion made him

ashamed of his coarse practical jest. The humour of the thing had

tempted him to do it; but it was a rude insult, which lowered him more

than it did Saul, and, like a true man, he blushes there in the gloom

at what he has done. Then he has to defend himself to his men for not

coming up to their expectations, and he does it by insisting on the

sacredness which still surrounded Saul as the Lord's anointed.' David

knew that the unhappy king had been rejected and forsaken by the Spirit

of the Lord,' and that he himself was the true bearer of the regal

unction; but he will not take the law into his own hands, and still

regards Saul as his lord.' He sets the example, much needed by us all,

of leaving God to carry out His purposes at His own time, and patiently

waiting till that time comes. He had hard work to keep his men from

rushing down on the king; but, having commanded himself, is able to

restrain them. How many virtues may be in exercise in one action! Here

we have generosity, clemency, sensitiveness of conscience, reverence,

self-abnegation, patience, loyalty, firmness, sway over lower natures

for high ends,--a whole constellation shining star-like in the dark

cavern.

II. We have, next, David's pathetic remonstrance. Saul was alone, and

David could easily escape among the cliffs, if the king summoned his

men; but he risks capture, in the gush of ancient friendship. His words

are full of nobleness, and his silence is no less so. He has no

reproaches, no anger nor hate. He will not even suppose that Saul has

followed his own impulses in his persecution, but assumes that he has

been led astray by calumnies. He points to the fragment of Saul's robe

in his hand as the disproof of the lie that he had designs against him,

and passionately asserts his innocence now and in all the past. He

compares himself to some timid wild thing, like one of the goats among

the cliffs, and Saul to a hunter. He solemnly calls God to judge

between them, and appeals from the slanders and misjudgings of men to

the perfect tribunal of God, to whom he commits his cause. He abjures

all intention of striking at Saul in his own defence. He quotes, in

true Eastern manner, a scrap of proverbial wisdom, which contains the

homely truth that character determines action; for it needs a wicked

man to do a wicked thing, and he implies that he is not wicked, and

that Saul knows that well enough,--by what has just happened, if by

nothing else. Then he puts his own insignificance and the disproportion

between him and his ragged band and the imposing force of Saul in vivid

light by his half-humorous and wholly humble description of himself as

a dead dog,' and a flea'; as harmless as the one, as hard to catch as

the other, as little important as either. Finally, he reiterates his

devout reference of the whole cause to God, and his fixed resolution to

take no steps to right himself, but to leave all to Him.

So ought we to deal with slanders and enmity. The eternal law for us in

all opposition and hostility is enshrined in David's noble words and

deeds. To repay evil with benefits, to abstain from retaliation when it

is in our power, to keep our tongues from bitter and wounding words, to

appeal to the adversary's better self, even at the cost of our own

dignity,'--all that is not easy nor usual among professing Christians.

But it ought to be. David's Lord, when He suffered, threatened not; but

committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.' We are poor

followers of Him, if David surpasses us in patience and magnanimity. It

has taken nineteen hundred years to teach us that passive endurance is

more heroic than fighting for our own hand, and that repaying scorn and

hate with their like is less noble than meeting them with endless

forgiveness.

Psalm vii. is all but universally regarded as David's, and as belonging

to this period. In it we find a clause, I have delivered him that

without cause was mine enemy,' which may fairly he supposed to refer to

the scene in the cave, and we read the same vehement protestations of

innocence, the same figure of himself as a hunted wild animal, the same

appeal to God's judgment, as in his remonstrance with Saul. The psalm

is the poetic echo of our lesson.

III. We have the momentary melting of Saul's heart. He breaks into

passionate weeping. With that sudden flashing out into vehement

emotion, so characteristic of him throughout, and, in these latter days

of his life, so significant of enfeebled self-control, he recognises

David's generous forbearance in its contrast to his own hate, which,

for the moment, he feels to be causeless. There is a piteous

remembrance of the days when David soothed him by song, in his mention

of the sweet voice,' and some rekindling of ancient love in his calling

him My son.' Then follow the sad words which confess the hopelessness

of his struggle against the divine purpose, and his appeal for mercy to

his house. The picture may well move solemn thoughts and pity for that

scathed and solitary soul, seeing for a moment, as by a lightning

flash, the madness of his course, and yet held so fast in the grip of

his dark passions that he cannot shake off their tyranny.

Two great lessons are taught by that tragic figure of the weeping and

yet unchanged king. One is of the power of forbearing gentleness to

exorcise hate. The true way to overcome evil' is to melt it by fiery

coals of gentleness. That is God's way. An iceberg may be crushed to

powder, but every fragment is still ice. Only sunshine that melts it

will turn it into sweet water. Love is conqueror, and the only

conqueror, and its conquest is to transform hate into love. The other

lesson is the worthlessness of mere feeling, which by its very nature

passes away, and, like unstored rain, leaves the rock in its obstinate

hardness more exposed. Saul only increased his guilt by reason of the

fleeting glimpse of his folly which he did not follow up; and our

gleams of insight into some sin and madness of ours but add to our

responsibility. Emotion which does not lead to action hardens the

heart, and adds to our guilt and condemnation.

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LOVE AND REMORSE

And David arose, and came to the place where Saul had pitched: and

David beheld the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Xer, the

captain of his host: and Saul lay in the trench, and the people pitched

round about him. 6. Then answered David and said to Ahimelech the

Hittite, and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother to Joab, saying,

Who will go down with me to Saul to the camp? And Abishai said, I will

go down with thee. 7. So David and Abishai came to the people by night:

and, behold, Saul lay sleeping within the trench, and his spear stuck

in the ground at his bolster: but Abner and the people lay round about

him. 8. Then said Abishai to David, God hath delivered thine enemy into

thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with

the spear even to the earth at once, and I will not smite him the

second time. 9. And David said to Abishai, Destroy him not: for who can

stretch forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?

10. David said furthermore, As the Lord liveth, the Lord shall smite

him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and

perish. 11. The Lord forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand

against the Lord's anointed: but, I pray thee, take thou now the spear

that is at his bolster, and the cruse of water, and let us go. 12. So

David took the spear and the cruse of water from Saul's bolster; and

they gat them away, and no man saw it, nor knew it, neither awaked: for

they were all asleep; because a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen

upon them . . .. 21. Then said Saul, I have sinned: return, my son

David: for I will no more do thee harm, because my soul was precious in

thine eyes this day: behold, I have played the fool, and have erred

exceedingly. 22. And David answered and said, Behold the king's spear!

and let one of the young men come over and fetch it. 23. The Lord

render to every man his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the

Lord delivered thee into my hand today, but I would not stretch forth

mine hand against the Lord's anointed. 24. And, behold, as thy life was

much set by this day in mine eyes, so let my life be much set by in the

eyes of the Lord, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation. 25.

Then Saul said to David, Blessed be thou, my son David: thou shalt both

do great things, and also shalt still prevail. So David went on his

way, and Saul returned to his place.'--1 SAMUEL xxvi 5-12; 21-25.

It is fashionable at present to regard this incident and the other

instance of David's sparing Saul, when in his power, as two versions of

one event. But it if not improbable that the hunted outlaw should twice

have taken refuge in the same place, or that his hiding-place should

have been twice betrayed. He had but a small choice of safe retreats,

and the Ziphites had motive for a second betrayal in the fact of the

first, and of its failure to secure David's capture. The whole cast of

the two incidents is so different that it is impossible to see how the

one could have been evolved from the other, and either they are both

true, or they are both unhistorical, or, at best, are both the product

of fancy working on, and arbitrarily filling up, a very meagre skeleton

of fact. Many of the advocates of the identity of the incident at the

bottom of the two accounts would accept the latter explanation; we take

the former.

Saul had three thousand men with him; David had left his little troop

in the wilderness,' and seems to have come with only his two

companions, Ahimelech and his own nephew, Abishai, to reconnoitre. He

sees, from some height, the camp, with the transport wagons making a

kind of barricade in the centre--just as camps are still arranged in

South Africa and elsewhere,--and Saul established therein as in a rude

fortification. A bold thought flashes into his mind as he looks.

Perhaps he remembered Gideon's daring visit to the camp of Midian. He

will go down, and not only into the camp, but to Saul,' through the

ranks and over the barrier. What to do he does not say, but the two

fierce fighters beside him think of only one thing as sufficient motive

for such an adventure. Abishai volunteers to go with him; no doubt

Ahimelech would have been ready also, but two were enough, and three

would only have increased risk. So they lay close hid till night fell,

and then stole down through the sleeping ranks with silent movements,

like a couple of Indians on the war-trail, climbed the barricade, and

stood at last where Saul lay, with his spear, as the emblem of

kingship, stuck upright at his head, and a cruse of water for slaking

thirst, if he awoke, beside him. Those who should have been his guards

lay sleeping round him, for a deep sleep from Jehovah was fallen upon

them.' What a vivid, strange picture it is, and how characteristic of

the careless discipline of unscientific Eastern warfare!

The tigerish lust for blood awoke in Abishai. Whatever sad, pitying,

half-tender thoughts stirred in David as he looked at the mighty form

of Saul, with limbs relaxed in slumber, and perhaps some of the gloom

and evil passions charmed out of his face, his nephew's only thought

was,' What a fair mark! what an easy blow!' He was brutally eager to

strike once, and truculently sure that his arm would make sure that

once would be enough. He was religious too, after a strange fierce

fashion. God-significantly he does not say Jehovah'; his religion was

only the vague belief in a deity-had delivered Saul into David's hands,

and it would be a kind of sin not to kill him. How many bloody

tragedies that same unnatural alliance of religion and murderous hate

has varnished over! Very beautifully does David's spirit contrast with

this. Abishai represents the natural impulse of us all--to strike at

our enemies when we can, to meet hate with hate, and do to another the

evil that he would do to us.

David here, though he could be fierce and cruel enough sometimes, and

had plenty of the devil in him, listens to his nobler self, which

listens to God, and, at a time when everything tempted him to avenge

himself, resists and overcomes. He is here a saint after the New

Testament pattern. Abishai had, in effect, said, Thou shalt love thy

neighbour, and hate thine enemy.' David's finely-tuned ear heard, long

before they were spoken on earth, the great Christian words, 11 say

unto you, Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.' He knew

that Saul had been rejected,' but he was Jehovah's anointed,' and the

unction which had rested on that sleeping head lingered still. It was

not for David to be the executor of God's retribution. He left himself

and his cause in Jehovah's hands, and no doubt it was with sorrow and

pitying love, not altogether quenched by Saul's mad hate, that he

foresaw that the life which he spared now was certain one day to be

smitten. We may well learn the lesson of this story, and apply it to

the small antagonisms and comparatively harmless enmities which may

beset our more quiet lives. David in Saul's laager,' Stephen outside

the wall, alike lead up our thoughts to Jesus' prayer,' Father, forgive

them; for they know not what they do.'

The carrying off of the spear and the cruse was a couch of almost

humour, and it, with the ironical taunt flung across the valley to

Abner, gives relief to the strain of emotion in the story. Saul's burst

of passionate remorse is morbid, paroxysmal, like his fits of fury, and

is sure to foam itself away. The man had no self-control. He had let

wild, ungoverned moods master him, and was truly possessed.' One

passion indulged had pushed him over the precipice into insanity, or

something like it. Let us take care not to let any passion, emotion, or

mood get the upper hand. That way madness lies.' He that hath no rule

over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, without walls.'

And let us not confound remorse with repentance The sorrow of the world

worketh death.' Saul grovelled in agony that day, but tomorrow he was

raging again with more than the old frenzy of hate. Many a man says, I

have played the fool,' and yet goes on playing it again when the

paroxysm of remorse has stormed itself out. David's answer was by no

means effusive, for he had learned how little Saul's regrets were to be

trusted. He takes no notice of the honeyed words of invitation to

return, and will not this time venture to take back the spear and

cruse, as he had done, on the previous occasion, the skirt of Saul's

robe. He solemnly appeals to Jehovah's righteous judgment to determine

his and Saul's respective righteousness and faithfulness.' He is silent

as to what that judgment may have in reserve for Saul, but for himself

he is calmly conscious that, in the matter of sparing Saul's life, he

has done right, and expects that God will deliver him out of all

tribulation.' That is not self-righteous boasting, although it does not

exactly smack of the Christian spirit; but it is faith clinging to the

confidence that God is not unrighteous to forget' his servant's

obedience, and that the innocent will not always be the oppressor's

victim.

What a strange, bewildered, self-contradictory chaos of belief and

intention is revealed in poor, miserable Saul's parting words! He

blesses the man whom he is hunting to slay. He knows that all his wild

efforts to destroy him are foredoomed to failure, and that David shall

surely prevail'; and yet he cannot give up fighting against the

inevitable,--that is, against God. How many of us are doing the very

same thing--rushing on in a course of life which we know, when we are

sane, to be dead against God's will, and therefore doomed to utter

collapse some day!

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SAUL

And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war

against me, and God is departed from me.'--1 SAMUEL xxviii. 15.

Among all the persons of Scripture who are represented as having fallen

away from God and wrecked their lives, perhaps there is none so

impressive as the giant form of the first king of Israel. Huge and

black, seamed and scarred with lightning marks of passions, moody and

suspicious, devil-ridden and lonely, doubting his truest friends, and

even his son, striking blindly in his fury at the gracious, sunny

poet-warrior who shows so bright, so full of resource, so nimble, so

generous, by contrast with the heavy strength of the moody giant, and

ever escapes the javelin that quivers harmlessly in the wall, with an

inevitable destiny hanging over his head, and at last creeping to

wizards that peep and mutter,' and dying a suicide, with his army in

full flight and his son dead at his feet--what a course and what an end

for the chosen of the Lord, on whom the Spirit of the Lord came with

the anointing oil, and gave him a new heart for his kingly office.

I know not anywhere a sadder story: and I know not where human lips

ever poured out a more awful wail--like a Titan in his rage of pain--

than these words of our text. Bright hopes and fair promise, and much

that was good and true in performance--all came to this. A few hours

more and the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him,

and he was greatly distressed by reason of the archers.' Madness,

despair, defeat, death, all were the sequel of, Because thou hast

rejected the commandment of the Lord, the Lord hath also rejected thee

from being king.' A true soul's tragedy! Let us look together at its

course, and gather the lessons that lie on the surface. We have neither

space nor wish here to enter upon the many points of minute interest

and curiosity which are in the story. We have to be contented with

large outlines.

Look then

I. At the bright dawn.

The early story gives us many traits of beauty in Saul's character. Not

only physical strength but a winning personality are apparent. His

modesty and humility when Samuel salutes him are made plain. And we are

distinctly told that as he turned away from Samuel, God gave him

another heart,' by which we are to understand not regeneration' but an

inspiration, that equipped him for his office.

How many a man finds that sudden elevation ruins him! But often it

evokes what is good, brings an entire change of disposition, as with

Harry of Mon-mouth.' But it was not only his new responsibility which

brought into action powers that had previously been dormant. New

circumstances, no doubt, did something, but Saul's new' heart was God's

gift.

The story of the beginning of his reign reveals a very noble and

lovable character. We can but mention his modesty in hiding among the

stuff, his disregard of the murmurs of those who would not do homage

(made as though he had been deaf'), his return, as it would seem, to

his home-life and farm-work, his chivalrous boldness and warlike

energy, which sprung at once to activity on the call of a great

exigency in Jabesh-Gilead, his humane and sweet repression of the

people's desire, in their first flush of pride in their soldier king,

to slay his enemies, and his devout acknowledgment that not he but God

has wrought this salvation.

So for the first year of his reign all went well.

How much of divine influence a man may have and yet fling it all away!

How unreliable a thing mere natural goodness is! How much apparent

goodness may coexist with deep-seated evil! How bright a beginning may

darken into a tempestuous day! How seeds of evil may lurk in the

fairest character! How little one can be judged by part of his life!

How it is not the possession, but the retention, of goodness and devout

impressions that makes a man good.

II. The gathering clouds.

The acts recorded as darkening the fair dawn of Saul's reign may seem

too trivial to deserve the stern retribution that followed them, but

small acts may be great sins. The first of them was his offering

sacrifices without authority, an act which Samuel stigmatised as

wanton, deliberate disobedience to the commandment of the Lord thy

God.' Next came his rash and absurd laying of a curse on any soldier

who should eat food before evening, and his consequent mad

determination to kill Jonathan, for taking a little honey' on the end

of his rod. Next came his flagrant disobedience to the divine command

transmitted to him through Samuel, to smite Amalek, and utterly destroy

all that they have, and spare them not,' We shudder at such ferocious

extermination, but we are to remember that Saul was moved by no pity,

but by mere lust for loot, and tried to deceive God, in the person of

His representative Samuel, by the lie that the people had coerced him,

and that the motive for preserving the best of the cattle was to

sacrifice them to the Lord. Samuel's blaze of indignation gave the

world the great word: Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice.'

Putting all these acts together, we have the sad picture of a character

steadily deteriorating. He is growing daily more self-willed and

impatient of the restraint of God's commanding will. He is chafing at

his position as a viceroy, not an absolute sovereign. He is becoming

tyrannical, careless of his subjects' lives, intolerant of opposition,

remonstrance, or advice. The tragedy of his decadence is summed up in

Samuel's stern word: Because thou hast rejected the word of the Lord,

He hath also rejected thee from being king.'

Trivial acts may show great and deep-seated evil. A small swelling

under the arm-pit is the sign of the plague and the precursor of swift

death.

The master-sin is disobedience, self-willed departure from God. That

disobedience may be as virulently active in a trifle as in a deed that

men call great. Self-will is the tap root of all sin, however

labyrinthine the outgrowth from it.

Disobedience honeycombs a soul. The attractive early traits in Saul's

character slowly perhaps but steadily, disappeared. The fair morning

sky was heavy with thunder-clouds by midday, and they all began with a

light fleecy film that none noticed at first.

III. The long eclipse.

An evil spirit from the Lord troubled him, and the Spirit of God

departed from him.'

Modern psychologists would call Saul's case an instance of insanity

brought about by indulgence in passion and self-will. Is there any

reason why the deeper, more religious explanation should not be united

with the scientific one? Does not God work in the working of natural'

phenomena?

What we nowadays call insanity is not very far off from a man who

habitually indulges in passionate self will, and spurns God from any

authority over his life. What were Saul's characteristics now? The

story tells of bursts of ungovernable fury, of unslumbering and

universal suspicions, of utter misery, seeing enemies everywhere and

complaining, None of you hath pity upon me,' of ferocious cruelty and

gloomy despair, of paroxysms of agonising but transient remorse.

It is an awful picture, and it grimly teaches lessons that we shall be

wise to write deeply on our hearts.

What a ruin a man makes of himself!

How hideous a godless soul is!

What unhappiness is certain if we dismiss God from ruling our lives!

How useless remorse is unless it leads to repentance!

IV. The stormy sunset.

The scene at Endor makes one's flesh creep. No more tragic picture of

failure and despair was ever painted. The greatest dramatists, whose

creations move the terror and pity of the world, have imagined no more

heart-touching figure.

It matters very little--nothing at all in fact--either for the dramatic

force or for the religious impressiveness of the scene, whether the

woman brought up' Samuel, or whether she was as much awed as Saul was,

by the coming up of an old man' covered with the well-known mantle.'

The boding prophecy of to-morrow's defeat and death filled yet fuller

the cup that had seemed to be already full of all misery. And that

collapse of strength in the huddled figure, prostrate in the witch's

den, may well stand for a prophecy of what will be the upshot at the

last of a self-will that boasts of its own power, and tries to shake

off dependence on God.

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WHAT DOEST THOU HERE?

Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews

here!'--1 SAMUEL xxix. 3.

The word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him, What doest thou

here, Elijah?'--1 KINGS xix. 9.

I have put these two verses together, not only because of their

identity in form, though that is striking, but because they bear upon

one and the same subject, as will appear, if, in a word or two, I set

each of them in its setting. David was almost at the lowest point of

his fortunes when he fled into foreign territory, and for awhile took

service under one of the kings of the Philistines. He served him

faithfully, and so, when the last great fight, in which Saul lost his

life, was about to be waged between Philistia and Israel, David and his

men came as a contingent to the army of the former. The Philistine

commanders, very naturally, were suspicious of these allies, just as

Englishmen would have been if, on the night before Waterloo, a brigade

of Frenchmen had deserted and offered their help to fight Napoleon. So

the question What do these Hebrews here?'--amongst our ranks--was an

extremely natural one, and it was answered in the only possible way, by

the subsequent departure of David and his men from the unnatural and

ill-omened alliance.

Now, that suggests to us that Christian people are out of their places,

even in the eyes of worldly people, when they are fighting shoulder to

shoulder with them in certain causes; and it suggests the propriety of

keeping apart. Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith

the Lord' What do these Hebrews here?' is a question that Philistia

often asks. But now turn to the other question. Elijah had fallen into

the mood of depression which so often follows great nervous tension. He

had just offered the sacrifice on Carmel, and brought all Israel back

to the Lord, and Jezebel had flamed out and threatened his life. The

usually undaunted prophet, in the reaction after his great effort, was

fearful for his life and deserted his work, flung himself into solitude

and shook the dust off his feet against Israel. Was that not just doing

what I have been saying that Christian people ought to do--separating

himself from the world? In a sense, yes, but the voice came, What dost

thou here, Elijah?' Go back to your work; to Ahab, to Jezebel. Go back

to death if need be. Do not shirk your duty on the pretence of

separating yourself from the world.'

So we put the two questions together. They limit one another, and they

suggest the via media, the course between, and lead me to say one or

two plain things about that duty of Christian separation from an evil

world.

I. The first thing that I would suggest to you is the inevitable

intermingling, which is the law of God, and therefore can never be

broken with impunity.

Christ's parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in the world being like a

man that sowed good seed in his field, which sprung up intermingled

with tares, contains the lesson, not so much of the purity or nonpurity

of the Church as of the inseparable intertwining in the world of

Christian people with others. The roots are matted together, and you

cannot pull up a tare without danger of pulling up a wheat-stalk that

has got interlaced with it. That is but to say that Society at present,

and the earthly form of the Kingdom of God, are not organised on the

basis of religious affinity, but upon a great many other things, such

as family, kindred, business, a thousand ties of all sorts which mat

men together, and make it undesirable, impossible, contrary to God's

intention, that the good people should club themselves together, and

leave the bad ones to rot and stink. The two are meant to be in close

contact. Let both grow together till the harvest.' If any Christian man

were to do as the monks of old did, fly into solitude to look after his

own soul, then the question which came to Elijah would be suitable to

him, What doest thou here?' Is there not work enough for you out there,

in that wicked world? Is that not the place for you? Where is the place

for the salt'? Where the meat is in danger of putrefaction. Rub it in!

That is what it was meant for. Ye are the light of the world.' That

suggests the picture of a lamp upon a pedestal that it may send out its

rays, but itself remains apart. But the companion metaphor suggests the

closest possible contact, and such contact is duty for us Christian

people. Elijah ran away from his work. There are types of Christian

life to-day unwholesomely self-engrossed, and too much occupied with

their own spiritual condition, to realise and discharge the duty of

witnessing in the world. Wherever you find a Christian man --whether he

is a monk with bare foot, and a rope round his brown robe, and shaven

head, or whether he is in the garb of modern Protestantism-- that tries

more to keep himself apart, in the enjoyment and cultivation of his own

religious life, than to fling himself into the midst of the world's

worst evil, in order to fight and to cure it, you get a man who is

sharing in Elijah's transgression, and needs Elijah's rebuke. The

intermingling is inevitable in the present state of things; and family,

kindred, business, social and political movements, all require that

Christian people should work side by side with men who are not

possessors of like precious faith.' If ever there have been individuals

or communities that have tried to traverse that law, they have

developed narrowness and bitterness and stunted growth, and a hundred

evils that we all know.

II. And now let me say a word about the second thing, and that is--the

imperative separation.

What do these Israelites here?' is the question. Much of all our lives

lies outside these necessary connections with the world, of which I

have been speaking. And the question for each of us is, What do we do

when we are left to do as we like? Where do we go? When the iron weight

fastened by the bit of string is taken off the sapling, it starts back

to its original uprightness. Is that what your Christianity does for

you? When you are left to yourself, when you have done all the work

that is required, and you are free, where do you turn naturally? It is

of no use to lay down special regulations. There has been far too much

regulation and red-tape in our Christianity all along. Do not let us

put so much stress upon individual acts. Let us look at the spirit.

Whither do I turn? What do I like to do? Who are my chosen companions?

What are my recreations? Is my life of such a sort as that the world

will point to me, and say, What! you here I a professing Christian;

what are you doing here?'

I remember that in the autobiography of Mr. Spurgeon, there is a story

told about what he did when a child, and living with his grandfather,

the pastor of a little country church. There was a very prominent

member of that church who was in the habit of going into the

public-house occasionally; and the small boy stepped into the sanded

parlour where this inconsistent man was sitting, walked up to him, and

said, What doest thou here, Elijah?' It was the turning-point of the

man's life. That is the question that I desire us all to ask

ourselves--where do we go, and what sort of lives do we live in the

moments when our own voluntary choice determines our action?

A man is known by the company he keeps,' says an old Latin proverb, and

I am bound to say that I do not think that it is a good sign of the

depth of a Christian professor's religion if he feels himself more at

home in the company of people who do not share his religion than in the

company of those that do. I do not wish to be strait-laced and narrow,

but I do not wish, either, to be so broad as to obliterate altogether

the distinction between Christian people and others. The fact of the

case is this, dear friends; if we are Christ's servants we have more in

common with the most uncongenial Christians than we have with the most

congenial man who is not a Christian. And if we were nearer our Master

we should feel that it was so. Being let go they went to their own

company.' Where do you go when you can make your choice?

I am not going to speak in detail about occupations or recreations. I

can quite believe that the theatre might be made an instrument of

morality. I can quite believe that a race-course might be a perfectly

innocent place. I can quite believe that there may be no harm in a

dance. All that I say is that there are two questions which every

Christian professor ought to ask himself about such subjects. One is,

Can I ask God to bless this thing, and my doing it? And the other is,

Does this help or hinder my religion? If we will take these two

questions with us as tests of conduct and companionship, I do not think

that we shall go far wrong, either in the choice of our companions, or

in the choice of our surroundings of any kind, or in the choice of our

recreations and our occupations. But if we do not, then I am quite sure

that we shall go wrong in them all. What communion hath light with

darkness?' What agreement hath the temple of God with idols? Come ye

out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord.'

The main question is, do I grasp the aim of life with clearness and

decision as being to make myself by God's help such a character as God

has pleasure in? If I do I shall regulate all these things thereby.

III. Now there is one last suggestion that I wish to make, and that is

the double questioning that we shall have to stand.

The lords of the Philistines said, What do these Hebrews here?' They

saw the inconsistency, if David and his men did not. They were sharp to

detect it, and David and his band did not rise in their opinion, but

decidedly went down, when they saw them marching there, in such an

unnatural place as behind Achish,' and ready to flesh their swords in

the blood of their brethren. So let me tell you, you will neither

recommend your religion nor yourselves to men of the world, by

inconsistently trying to identify yourselves with them. There are a

great many professing Christians nowadays whose mouths are full of the

word liberality,' and who seem to try to show how absolutely identical

with a godless man's a God-fearing one's life may be made. Do you think

that the world respects that type of Christian, or regards his religion

as the kind of thing to be admired? No; the question that they fling at

such people is the question which David was humiliated by having

pitched at his head--What do these Hebrews here?' Let them go back to

their mountains. This is no place for them.' The world respects an

out-and-out Christian; but neither God nor the world respects an

inconsistent one.

But there is another question, and another Questioner--What doest thou

here, Elijah?' God did not ask Elijah the question because he did not

know the answer; but because he wished to make Elijah put his mood into

words, since then Elijah would understand it a little better, and, when

he found the tremendous difficulty of making a decent excuse, would

begin to suspect that the conduct that wanted so much glozing was not

exactly the conduct fit for a prophet. And so let us think that God is

looking down upon us, in all our occupation of our free time, and that

He is wishing us to put into words what we are about, and why we are

where we are.

What do you think you would say if, in some of these moments of

unnecessary intermingling with questionable things and doubtful people,

you were brought suddenly to this, that you had to formulate into some

kind of plausibility your reason for being there? I am afraid it would

be a very lame and ragged set of reasons that many of us would have to

give. Well! better that we should now have to answer the question What

doest thou here?' than that we should have to fail in answering the

future question, after we have done with the world: What didst thou

there?'

Dear brethren, let us cleave to Christ, and that will separate us from

the world. If we cleave to the world, that will separate us from

Christ. I do not insist on details of conduct, but I do beseech you,

professing Christians, to recognise that you are set in the world in

order to grow like your Master, and that their tendency to help you to

that likeness is the one test of all occupations, recreations, and

companionships, by which we may know whether we are in or out of the

place that pleases Him. And if we are in it, that blessed hope which is

held forth in the parable to which I have already referred, will come

full of sweetness and of strength to us, that, yonder, men will be

grouped according to their moral and religious character; that the

tares will be taken away from the wheat, and, that as Christ says, Then

shall the righteous flame as the sun in their heavenly Father's

Kingdom.'

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THE SECRET OF COURAGE

But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'--1 SAMUEL xxx. 6.

David was at perhaps the very lowest ebb of his fortunes. He had long

been a wandering outlaw, and had finally been driven, by Saul's

persistent hostility, to take refuge in the Philistines' country. He

had gathered around himself a band of desperate men, and was living

very much like a freebooter. He had found refuge in a little city of

the Philistines, far down in the South, from which he and his men had

marched as a contingent in the Philistine army, which was preparing an

attack upon Saul. But, naturally, the Philistine soldiers doubted their

ally, and he was obliged to take himself and his troops back again to

their temporary home.

When he came there it was a heap of smoking ruins. Everything was gone;

property, cattle, wives, children--and all was desolation. His

turbulent followers rose against him, a mutiny broke out--a dangerous

thing amongst such a crew--and they were ready to stone him. And at

that moment what did he do? Nothing. Was he cast down? No. Was he

agitated? No. But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

Now the first thing I notice is

I. The grand assurance which this man gripped fast at such a time.

It is not by accident, nor is it a mere piece of tautology, that we

read the Lord his God.' For, if you will remember, the very keynote of

the psalms which are ascribed to David is just that expression, My

God,' My God.' So far as the very fragmentary records of Jewish

literature go, it would appear as if David was the very first of all

the ancient singers to grapple that thought that he stood in a

personal, individual relation to God, and God to him. And so it was his

God that he laid hold of at that dark hour.

Now I am not putting too much into a little word when I insist upon it

that the very essence and nerve of what strengthened David, at that

supreme moment of desolation, was the conviction that welled up in his

heart that, in spite of it all, he had a grip of God's hand as his very

own, and God had hold of him. Just think of the difference between the

attitude of mind and heart expressed in the names that were more

familiar to the Israelitish people, and this name for Jehovah. The God

of Israel'--that is wide, general; and a man might use it and yet fail

to feel that it implied that each individual of the community stood by

himself in a personal relation to God. But David penetrated through the

broad, general thought, and got into the heart of the matter. It was

not enough for him, in his time of need, to stay himself upon a vague

universal goodness, but he had to clasp to his burdened heart the

individualising thought, the God of Israel is my God.'

Think, too, of the contrast of the thoughts and emotions suggested by

My God,' and by the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob.' Great

as that name is, it carries the mind away back into the past, and

speaks of a historical relation in former days, which may or may not

continue in all its tenderness and sweetness and power into the prosaic

present. But when a man feels, not only the God of Jacob is our

Refuge,' but, the God of Jacob is my God,' then the whole thing flashes

up into new power. My sun'--will one man claim property in that great

luminary that pours its light down on the whole world? Yes.

The sun whose beams most glorious are,

Disdaineth no beholder,'

as the old song has it. Each man's eye receives the straight impact of

its universal beams. It is my sun, though it be the light that lightens

all men that come into the world. My atmosphere'--will one man claim

the free, unappropriated winds of heaven as his? Yes, for they will

pour into his lungs; and yet his brother will be none the poorer.

I would not go the length of saying that the living realisation, in

heart and mind, of this personal possession of God is the difference

between a traditional and vague profession of religion and a vital

possession of religion, but if it is not the difference, it goes a long

way towards explaining the difference. The man who contents himself

with the generality of a Gospel for the world, and who can say no more

than that Jesus Christ died for all, has yet to learn the most intimate

sweetness, and the most quickening and transforming power, of that

Gospel, and he only learns it when he says, Who loved me, and gave

Himself for me.'

So do not let us be content with saying, the God of Israel,' and its

many thousands, or the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob,' who

filled the past with His lustre, but let us bring the general good into

our own houses, as men might draw the waters of Niagara into their

homes through pipes, and let us cry: My Lord and my God!' David

encouraged himself in the Lord his God.'

II. Now note, secondly, the sufficiency of this one conviction and

assurance.

Here is one of the many eloquent buts' of the Bible. On the one hand is

piled up a black heap of calamities, loss, treachery and peril; and

opposed to them is only that one clause: But David encouraged himself

in the Lord his God.' There was only one possession in all the world,

except his body and the clothes that he stood in, that he could call

his own at that moment. Everything else was gone; his property was

carried off by raiders, his home was smouldering embers. But the

Amalekites had not stolen God from him. Though he could no longer say,

My house, my city, my possessions,' he could say, My God.' Whatever

else we lose, as long as we have Him we are rich; and whatever else we

possess, we are poor as long as we have not Him. God is enough;

whatever else may go. The Lord his God was the sufficient portion for

this man when he stood a homeless pauper. He had lost everything that

his heart clung to; wives, children; Abigail and Abinoam were captives

in the arms of some Amalekites; his house was left to him desolate; his

heart was bleeding. But David encouraged himself in the Lord his God'

and the bleeding heart was stanched, and the yearning for some one to

love and be loved by was satisfied, when he turned himself from the

desolation of earth to the riches in the heavens. He was standing on

the edge of possible death, for his followers were ready to stone him.

He had come through many perils in the past, but he had never been

nearer a fatal end than he was at that moment. But the thought of the

undying Friend lifted him buoyantly above the dread of death, and he

could look with an unwinking eye right into the fleshless eye-sockets

of the skeleton, and say, I fear no evil, for Thou art with me.'

So for poverty, loss, the blasting of earthly hopes, the crushing of

earthly affections, the extremity of danger, and the utmost threatening

of death, here is the sufficient remedy--that one mighty assurance: The

Lord is my God.' For if He is the strength of my heart,' He will be my

portion for ever.' He is not poor who has God for his, nor does he

wander with a hungry heart who can rest his heart on God's; nor need he

fear death who possesses God, and in Him eternal life.

So, brethren, in all our changing circumstances, there is more than

enough for us in that sweet, simple, strong thought. The end of sorrow

(that is to say, the purpose thereof) is to breed in us the conviction

that God is ours, to drive us to Him by lack of all beside; and the end

of sorrow (that is to say, the termination thereof) is the kindling in

our hearts of the light of that blessed assurance, for with Him we

shall fear no evil. You never know the good of the breakwater until the

storm is rolling the waves against its outer side. Light a little

candle in a room, and you will not see the lightning when it flashes

outside, however stormy the sky, and seamed with the fiery darts. If we

have God in our hearts, we have enough for courage and for strength.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how this darkest moment of David's

fortunes was the moment at which the darkness broke. Three days after

this emeute of his turbulent followers, there came a fugitive into the

camp with news that Saul was dead and David was king. So it was not in

vain that he had strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' Our light

affliction which is but for a moment' leads on to a manifestation of

the true power of God our Friend, and to the breaking of the day.

III. And now the last thing to be noted is the effort by which this

assurance is attained and sustained.

The words of the original convey even more forcibly than those of our

translation the thought of David's own action in securing him the hold

of God as his. He strengthened himself in the Lord his God.' The Hebrew

conveys the notion of effort, persistent and continuous; and it tells

us this, that when things are as black as they were round David at that

hour--it is not a matter of course, even for a good man, that there

shall well up in his heart this tranquillising and victorious

conviction; but he has to set himself to reach and to keep it. God will

give it, but He will not give it unless the man strains after it. David

strengthened himself in the Lord,' and if he had not doggedly set about

resisting the pressure of circumstances, and flinging himself as it

were, by an effort, into the arms of God, circumstances would have been

too strong for him, and despair would have shrouded his soul. In the

darkest moment it is possible for a man to surround himself with God's

light, but even in the brightest it is not possible to do so unless he

makes a serious effort.

That effort must consist mainly in two things. One is that we shall

honestly try to occupy our minds, as well as our hearts, with the truth

which certifies to us that God is, in very deed, ours. If we never

think, or think languidly and rarely, about what God has revealed to

us, by the word and life and death and intercession of Jesus Christ,

concerning Himself, His heart of love towards us, and His relations to

us, then we shall not have, either in the time of disaster or of joy,

the blessed sense that He is indeed ours. If a man will not think about

Christian truth he will not have the blessedness of Christian

possession of God. There is no mystery about the road to the sweetness

and holiness and power that may belong to a Christian. The only way to

win them is to be occupied, far more than most of us are, with the

plain truths of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. If you never think

about them they cannot affect you, and they will not make you sure that

God is yours.

But we cannot occupy ourselves with these truths unless we have a

distinct and resolute purpose running through our lives, of averting

our eyes from the things that might make us lose sight of them and of

Him. David had his choice. He could either, as a great many of us do,

stand there and look, and look, and look, and see nothing but his

disasters, or he could look past them; and see beyond them God. Peter

had his choice whether he would look at the water, or whether he would

look at Jesus Christ. He chose to look at the water; and when he saw

the wind boisterous he began to sink'--of course, and when he looked at

Christ and cried: Lord, save me!' he was held up--equally of course.

Make the effort not to let the sorrowful things, or the difficult

things, or the fearful things, or the joyous things, in your life,

absorb you, but turn away, and, as the writer of the Epistle to the

Hebrews says, in another connection, look off unto Jesus, the Author

and Finisher of faith.' David had to put constraint upon himself, to

admit any other thoughts into his mind than those that were pressed

into it by the facts before his eyes; but he put on the constraint, and

so he was encouraged because he encouraged himself.

There is another thing which we have to make an effort to do, if we

would have the blessedness of this conviction filling and flooding our

hearts. For the possession is reciprocal; we say, My God,' and He says,

My people.' Unless we yield ourselves to Him and say, I am Thine,' we

shall never be able to say, Thou art mine.' We must recognise His

possession of us; we must yield ourselves; we must obey; we must elect

Him as our chief good, we must feel that we are not our own, but bought

with a price. And then when we look up into the heavens thus

submissive, thus obedient, thus owning His authority and His rights, as

well as claiming His love and His tenderness, and cry: My Father,' He

will bend down and whisper into our hearts: Thou art My beloved son.'

Then we shall be strong, and of a good courage,' however weak and

timid, and we shall be rich, though, like David, we have lost all

things.

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AT THE FRONT OR THE BASE

As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that

tarrieth by the stuff.'--1 SAMUEL xxx. 24.

David's city of Ziklag had been captured by the Amalekites, while he

and all his men who could carry arms were absent, serving in the army

of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. On their return they found

ruin, their homes harried, their wives, children, and property carried

off. Wearied already with their long march, they set off at once in

pursuit of the spoilers, who had had a long start of them. When they

reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were too weary and

footsore to ford it, and so had to be left behind. But these were not

useless, for the heavy baggage was left in their charge, and the other

four hundred were thus enabled to march more lightly, and therefore

more swiftly. They picked up a sick slave, whom his Amalekite master

had heartlessly abandoned to die on the veldt.' He was almost dead, so

they fed him, and when he was able to answer, questioned him. He

undertook to guide David and his band, and thus, as twilight was

beginning to fall and the Amalekites were spread abroad over all the

ground, eating and drinking and feasting because of all the great spoil

that they had taken.' the four hundred burst on them, routed them

utterly, and won back all their goods and much more.

Then came a quarrel. The four hundred who had gone to the fight

insisted that the booty was theirs, and that the two hundred who had

had no hand in winning it should have no share in the distribution. But

David over-ruled this and laid down a principle of distribution which

was adopted as the standing law of Israel--that the soldiers who were

actually in the fight and those who stayed behind guarding the baggage,

looking after the base of operations,' should share alike. It was fair

that they should do so, for the two hundred would willingly have been

in the thick of battle, and, further, though they did not fight, they

helped the fighters, and by guarding the heavy baggage contributed to

the victory as really as if they had been in the fray and come out of

it with swords dripping with Amalekite blood.

I. God's battle requires two forms of service.

In David's raid, as in every campaign, some of the available strength

has to be taken to guard the camp, the place where the supplies are,

the base of operations, and pickets and detachments have to be left

behind all the way, to keep open the communication. The sword is not

more needful than the long train of baggage carts, and the forwarding

of supplies to the front is as indispensable to the conduct of the war

as the headlong charge.

In every great work there is the same distinction of parts and

functions, all co-operating to produce the effect which seems to be

entirely due to that cause which happens to come last in the series.

Organisation of labour associates many hands in the different stages of

the one result. There are very few things in this world which are the

product of one simple cause alone. You cannot grow a grain of corn

without the seed with its vital germ, the soil with its mysterious

influences, the sunshine and the rain, the sower's hand and basket, the

plougher's plough, and all these, except the blessed sunshine, are the

results of a series of other causes which lie forgotten, but are really

represented in the issue. If one of them were struck out, all the rest

would be ineffectual. In a great machine all its parts are equally

necessary, and a defect in a cog on a wheel would be as fatal as a flaw

in the cylinder or a crack in the mighty shaft. What would become of a

ship if the pintle that the rudder works on were away? The effect of a

whole orchestra may depend on the coming in of the flute at the right

place.

So in the work which God has given to the Church to do, there are the

two forms of service, the direct and the indirect. There are the

fighters and the guards of the baggage. And these two are equally

necessary. That without which a great work could not have been done is

great. When Luther came out from the Diet of Worms, and a knight

clapped him on the shoulder, and said, Well done! little monk,' he had

a share in the memorable deed of that day. The man who gave Luther a

flagon of beer when his lips were dry with speaking there before

emperor and cardinals, was included in the promise to the giver of a

cup of cold water in the name of a disciple.'

We have brethren in Christ who have gone to the front, hazarding their

lives on the high places of the field. Their hands will droop if they

do not feel that a chain of sympathy stretches between them and us, for

they in their solitude need all the strength which the confidence of a

multitude at home feeling with them can give. They are powerfully

influenced by the tone of feeling among us. When devotion languishes

and faith droops here, these will generally pass through the same

phases among them. When we are strong and bold, their hearts will be

quickened by the pulsations of ours, and their courage heightened by

thoughts of those from whom they come. Our disorders, our heresies, our

struggles are all reproduced on the mission field. An epidemic here

travels thither before long, and the spiritual condition of the Church

at home is one of the most powerful means of determining that of the

churches abroad. A blight among our vines soon shows itself in the

little gardens just reclaimed from the waste.

The fighters need material helps and appliances for their work. The

days in which the law for apostles and missionaries was, Go forth

without purse or scrip,' ended before Jesus said, Go ye into all the

world.' That condition was solemnly revoked by our Lord Himself, when

He said, When I sent you forth without purse and scrip and shoes,

lacked ye anything? But now he that hath a purse, let him take it, and

likewise his scrip.' The fighters' material wants are now to be met by

Christ's administration of natural means, even as before they had been

met by Christ's administration of supernatural ones. His messengers

cannot live, do their work, or extend the kingdom, but by the help of

material appliances. Those who abide by the stuff' are to organise the

commissariat department, and to see that those who are far ahead, among

the ranks of the foe, do not want for either food or weapons, and are

not left isolated, hemmed in by the enemy, and languishing because they

feel that they are forgotten by those who live at home at ease.'

There has always been that division of labour. Our Lord Himself had

need of' many humble instruments as helpers. There were the woman who

ministered to His wants, the faithful few whose presence and sympathy

were joyful to Him even on the Mount of Transfiguration, and longed for

even in the awful solitude of the agony in Gethsemane, the sisters of

Bethany whose humble home was His last shelter before the Cross, the

owner of the Upper Room, the sad women who prepared sweet spices, the

ruler who consecrated his new sepulchre in a garden by His body. Even

He, treading the wine-press alone, needed helpers in the background,

and, while conquering for us in the awful duel with our enemy, had

humble friends who tarried by the stuff.' Similarly Paul had his

helpers, on whose names he lovingly lingers and has made immortal, a

Gaius, mine host, and of the whole church,' an Epaphroditus, my fellow

soldier, who ministered to my wants,' and therefore was a soldier,

though he did not fight, an Onesiphorus, who oft refreshed me, and was

not ashamed of my chain.'

But let us remember that these two forms of service which are equally

necessary are equally binding on us all, in the measure of our

opportunity and capacity. Our performing the indirect is no excuse for

our neglecting the direct. The conversion of the world is our business

and not to be handed over to any society or missionary. No Christian

can be only and always a non-combatant, without sin and loss. He is

bound to take some share in the actual conflict in one or other of its

many parts.

II. Service may be different in kind and one in essence.

The determining element in our actions is their motive. Not what we

work in, but what we work for, gives the principle of classification.

Not the spots on the skin or the colour of the feathers, but the bony

skeleton, is the basis of zoological classification. It is not the size

or binding of a book, be it quarto or folio or octavo, be it in leather

or cloth or paper covers, but its subject, that settles its place in a

catalogue. The Christian motives of love to Christ, self-sacrifice,

devotion, love to men, make all deeds the same which have these in them

in like strength. It matters not whether the copy of a great picture be

in oils or an engraving or a photograph, so long as it is a copy. The

smallest piece of indirect Christian service may be thus elevated to

the same plane as the greatest.

Mere money-giving' may have in it all these qualities, as truly and in

as great a degree, as the deeds of Apostles and martyrs. Remember how

Peter puts in one category these two forms of service, as equally

flowing from the manifold grace of God,' and equally to be exercised as

good stewards' thereof--If any man speaketh, speaking as it were the

oracles of God; if any man ministereth, ministering as of the strength

which God supplieth.' Remember how Paul classes all varieties of

service as equally gifts according to the grace given to us,' and to be

exercised in the same spirit whatever are the difference in their

forms: or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that

teacheth, to his teaching: he that giveth, let him do it with

liberality . . . he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.'

Let us learn, then, how we ought to help Christian fighters for Christ

--as associating ourselves with them and their work by sympathy and

sharing in their spirit and motives.

Let us learn how loftily we ought to think of the possible sacredness

of the most secular forms of help, and to try thus to consecrate our

indirect service.

III. All work done from the same motive will receive the same reward.

None need be startled by the thought that Christian work is rewarded.

Essentially, it is not deeds but character that is rewarded. The

reward' is the possession of God of which such a character is capable,

and the consequent blessedness which fills such a soul, and cannot but

fill it, and which can be enjoyed by no other. The faithful servant

enters into the joy of the Lord; the faithful administrator of his

Lord's talents enters on the rule over cities in number the same as the

talents. Capacity for service is the result of stewardship rightly

administered here, and new opportunities yonder are sure to be provided

for new capacities.

God's judgment takes little note of that which men's judgment all but

exclusively notes. The conspicuousness or success of a man's deeds is

nothing to Him. Differences of power are of no account. It is

faithfulness that is required in a steward, and it is all the same

whether the stewardship is of millions or of farthings. The saints

nearest the glory in heaven will not always be the men whose words or

deeds fill the pages of Church history and resound through the ages.

There will be astounding new principles of nearness and comparative

remoteness then.

Christ was repeating what David made a law in Israel, when He said: He

that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a

prophet's reward.' Therein He recognises the identity in spiritual

stature and motive for service, of the prophet and of his dumb helper,

and assures us that those who, in widely different ways but under the

guidance of the same spirit and motives, have contributed their

respective shares to the one triumphant result shall be associated and

equalised in the immortal reward.

So remember that what is necessary in our indirect work, if it is to be

thus honoured, is that it should have our devotion, and our love to

Jesus and to men, throbbing in it, and that it should be accompanied by

direct work, in so far as we have opportunities for that. Moneygiving

may be made sacred, and by it, exercised in the right spirit, we may

lay up in store for ourselves a good foundation' and may lay hold upon

eternal life.'

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THE END OF SELF-WILL

Now the Philistines fought against Israel; and the men of Israel fled

from before the Philistines, and fell down slain in mount Gilboa. 2.

And the Philistines followed hard upon Saul and upon his sons; and the

Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchi-shua, Saul's sons.

3. And the battle went sore against Saul, and the archers hit him; and

he was sore wounded of the archers. 4. Then said Saul unto his

armourbearer, Draw thy sword, and thrust me through therewith; lest

these uncircumsised come and thrust me through, and abuse me. But his

armourbearer would not; for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a

sword, and fell upon it 5. And when his armourbearer saw that Saul was

dead, he fell likewise upon his sword, and died with him. 6. So Saul

died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that

same day together. 7. And when the men of Israel that were on the other

side of the valley, and they that were on the other side Jordan, saw

that the men of Israel fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead, they

forsook the cities, and fled; and the Philistines came and dwelt in

them. 8. And it came to pass on the morrow, when the Philistines came

to strip the slain, that they found Saul and his three sons fallen in

mount Gilboa. 9. And they out off his head, and stripped off his

armour, and sent into the land of the Philistines round about, to

publish it in the house of their idols, and among the people. 10. And

they put his armour in the house of Ashtaroth: and they fastened his

body to the wall of Beth-shan. 11. And when the inhabitants of

Jabesh-gilead heard of that which the Philistines had done to Saul; 12.

All the valiant men arose, and went all night, and took the body of

Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and came to

Jabesh, and burnt them there. 19. And they took their bones, and buried

them under a tree at Jabesh. and fasted seven days.'--1 SAMUEL xxxi.

1-13.

The story of Saul's tragic last days is broken in two by the account,

in chapters xxix. and xxx., of David's fortunate dismissal from the

invading army, and his exploits against Amalek. The contrast between

the two lives, so closely intertwined and powerful for good and evil on

each other, reaches its climax at the end of Saul's. While the one sets

in dark thunderclouds, the other is bright with victory. While the fall

of Saul lays all northern Israel bleeding at the feet of the enemy,

David is sending the spoils of his conquest to the elders of Judah.

Saul's headless and dishonoured body hangs rotting in the sun on the

walk of Bethshan, while David sits a conqueror in Ziklag. The

introduction of the brightness of the two preceding chapters is

intended to heighten the darkness that broods over this one, and to

deepen the stern teaching of that terrible death. Defeat, desolation,

despair, attend to his self-dug grave the unhappy king, whose end

teaches us all what comes of self-willed resistance to the law and the

Spirit of God. Everything else is subordinated in the narrative to the

account of his death. Next to nothing is said about the battle, the

very site of which is left obscure. We cannot tell whether it was

fought down in the plain by the fountain at Jezreel, where Israel was

encamped, according to 1 Samuel xxix. 1, or whether both sides

manoeuvred and changed their ground, and the decisive struggle was on

the slope of Gilboa. In any case, the site was almost identical with

that of Gideon's victory, but there was no Gideon in command on that

dark day. The language of verse 1 seems to imply that the battle was

over and the rout begun before the Israelites reached Gilboa. If so, we

have to conceive of a short, hopeless struggle on the plain, and then a

rush to the hills for safety, in which Saul and his sons and bodyguard

were borne along, but held together, closely followed by the red

pursuing spear' of the conquerors, fierce with ancestral hate and the

memories of defeat. There, on the hillside, stands the towering form of

Saul with a little ring of his children and retainers round him, the

words he had heard last night in the sorceress' tent unnerving his arm,

and many a past crime rising before him, and whispering in his ear,

In the battle think on me,

And fall thy edgeless sword; despair and die.'

There seems to have been a close encounter with some of the pursuers,

and a hand-to-hand fight, in which Jonathan and his two brothers fell,

and the rest of the bodyguard were slain or scattered. The prophecy of

that mantle-swathed shape last night was in part fulfilled--To-morrow

shalt thou and thy sons be with me.' They lay stark at his feet, and he

knew that he would soon join them. The last heart that loved him had

ceased to beat in Jonathan's noble breast, and his own crimes had slain

his sons. Who can paint the storm of contending passions in that lonely

black soul? or were they all frozen into the numbness of despair?

But whatever else was in his soul, repentance was not there. He may

have been seared by remorse, but he was not softened by penitence, and

was fierce and proud in despair as he had been in prosperity. The

Revised Version substitutes overtook' for hit' in verse 3; but Saul's

fear lest these uncircumcised come' is against that rendering, and the

fact that the enemy did not know of his death till next day (v. 8) is a

difficulty in the way of accepting it. The word is literally found' and

possibly means that the archers recognised him, and were making for

him, though, as would appear, from some cause they missed him in the

confusion. The other change in the Revised Version, that of greatly

distressed' for sore wounded' fits the context; and if it be adopted,

we have the picture of the unwounded but desperate man, once brave, but

now stricken with a panic which opens his lips for his only word. In

grim silence he had met the loss of battle, sons, and kingdom; but the

proud sense of personal dignity is strong to the end, and he fiercely

issues his last command, and embraces death to escape insult. The

haughty spirit was unchanged, crushed but the same, unsoftened, and

therefore roused to madder defiance of God and man. What an awful last

saying for the anointed of Jehovah,' and how the overweening self-will

and vehemence and passionate pride of his whole life are gathered up in

it!

His last command is disobeyed by the trembling armour-bearer, whose

very awe makes him disobedient, Did Saul, at that last moment, send a

thought to an armour-bearer whom he had had in happier days, and who

was to inherit his lost kingdom? The enemy are coming nearer. No time

is to be lost if he would escape the savage mutilations and torments

which ancient warfare made the portion of captive kings. Not another

word passes his lips, but, in the same grim silence, he fixes his sword

upright in the ground, and flings himself on its point, and dies. All

through his reign no hand had injured him but his own; and, as he

lived, so he died, his own undoer and his own murderer. Suicide, the

refuge of defeated monarchs and praised by heathen moralists as heroic,

was rare in Israel. Saul, Ahithophel, and Judas are the instances of

it. The most rudimentary recognition of the truths taught by the Old

Testament would prevent it. If Saul had had any faith in God, any

submission, any repentance, he could not have finished a life of

rebellion by a self-inflicted death, which was itself the very

desperation of rebellion. We have not to pronounce on his fate, but his

act was a sin of the darkest dye.

Yet note how the narrative abstains from all comment. It neither

condemns nor pities, though a profound sense of the tragic eclipse is

audible in that summing up in verse 6: So Saul died, and his three

sons, and his armour-bearer, and all his men (that is, immediate

followers or escort), that same day together.' And there they all lay,

bloody corpses in the fellowship of death, on the slopes of Gilboa.

Where Scripture Is silent, it is not our part to speak; but we can

scarcely turn from that mighty form, prone by his own rash act, without

seeking to learn the lesson of his life and fate. Saul had many noble

and lovable qualities, such as bravery, promptitude, in his earlier

days modesty and generosity. All these he had by nature, but there is

no sign that he ever sought to cultivate his moral character, or to win

any grace that did not come naturally to him; nor is there any reason

to suppose that religion had ever any strong hold on him. His whole

character may be summed up in Samuel's words in announcing his

rejection: Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is

as idolatry.' Rebellion persisted in, in spite of all remonstrances and

checks, till it becomes master of the whole man, is the keynote of his

later years. Before that baleful influence, as before some hot poison

wind, all the flowers of good dispositions were burned up, and the bad

stimulated to growth. His early virtues disappeared, and passed into

their opposites. Modesty became arrogance, and a long course of

indulgence in self-will developed cruelty, gloomy suspicion, and

passionate anger, and left him the victim and slave of his own

causeless hate. He who rebels against God mars his own character. The

miserable later years of Saul, haunted and hunted as by a demon by his

own indulged and swollen rebellion and unsleeping suspicion, are an

example of the sorrows that ever dog sin; and, as he lies there on

Gilboa, the terrible saying recurs to our memory: He that being often

reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that

without remedy.'

The remainder of the chapter is occupied with three points, bearing on

the solemn tragedy just recorded. First, we have the disastrous effects

of it in the complete loss of the northern territories. The men . . .

that were on the other side of the valley' are the tribes to the north

of the great plain; and they that were on the other side Jordan' are

probably those on the east bank. So thorough was the defeat, especially

as Saul and the royal house were slain, that they abandoned their

homes, and the Philistines took possession. One sinner destroyeth much

good.' When Israel's king was madly rebellious, Israel was smitten, and

its inheritance diminished.

Next we have the insults to the headless corpses. The Philistines did

not know till the following day how complete was their victory. The

account in 1 Chronicles x. adds that Saul's head was sent to the temple

of Dagon, probably as a kind of effacing of the shame wrought there by

the presence of the ark. The false gods had triumphed, as their

worshippers thought, and Saul's death was Jehovah's defeat. That

apparent victory of the idols and the mocking exultation over the

bloody trophy and dinted armour are, to the historian, not the least

bitter consequences of the battle.

The last point is the brave midnight march of the men of Jabesh from

their home on the eastern uplands beyond Jordan, across the river and

up to Bethshan, perched on its lofty cliff, and overlooking the valley

of the Jordan. It was a requital of Saul's deed in his early bright

days, when, with his hastily raised levies, he scattered the Ammonites.

It is one gleam of light amid the stormy sunset. There were men ready

to hazard their lives even then, because of the noblest of Saul's acts,

which no tyrannical arbitrariness or fierceness of later days had

blotted out. So the little band of grateful heroes carried back their

ghastly load to Jabesh, and burned the mutilated bodies there,

employing an unfamiliar mode, as we may suppose, by reason of their

mutilation and decomposition, and then reverently gathering the white

bones from the pyre, and laying them below the well-known tamarisk.

Saul's one good deed as king sowed seeds of gratitude which flourished

again, when the opportunity came. His many evil ones sowed evil seed

which bore fatal fruit; and both were seen in his end.

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EXPOSITIONS OF HOLY SCRIPTURE

ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D., Litt. D.

SECOND SAMUEL AND THE BOOKS OF KINGS TO SECOND KINGS VII

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THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL

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THE BRIGHT DAWN OF A REIGN

And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the Lord,

saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the Lord

said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And He

said, Unto Hebron. 2. So David went up thither, and his two wives also,

Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail, Nabal's wife, the Carmelite. 3.

And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his

household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron. 4. And the men of

Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabesh-gilead were they

that buried Saul. 5. And David sent messengers unto the men of

Jabesh-gilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye

have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have

buried him. 6. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I

also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.

7. Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for

your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me

king over them. 8. But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host,

took Ishb-osheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim; 9.

And he made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over

Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel. 10.

Ish-bosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over

Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.

11. And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah

was seven years and six months.'--2 SAMUEL ii. 1-11.

The last stage of David's wanderings had brought him to Ziklag, a

Philistine city. There he had been for over a year, during which he had

won the regard of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. He had, at

Achish's request, accompanied him with his contingent, in the invasion

of Israel, which crushed Saul's house at Gilboa; but jealousy on the

part of the other Philistine leaders had obliged his patron to send him

back to Ziklag. He found it a heap of ashes. An Amalekite raid had

carried off all the women and children, and his soldiers were on the

point of mutiny. His fortunes seemed desperate, but his courage and

faith were high, and he paused not a moment for useless sorrow, but

swept after the robbers, swooped down on them like a bolt out of the

blue, and scattered them, recovering the captives and spoil. He went

back to the ruins which had been Ziklag, and three days after heard of

Saul's death.

The lowest point of his fortunes suddenly turned into the highest, for

now the path to the throne was open. But the tidings did not move him

to joy. His first thought was not for himself, but for Saul and

Jonathan, whose old love to him shone out again, glorified by their

deaths. Swift vengeance from his hand struck Saul's slayer; the lovely

elegy on the great king and his son eased his heart. Then he turned to

front his new circumstances, and this passage shows how a God-fearing

man will meet the summons to dignity which is duty. It sets forth

David's conduct in three aspects-his assumption of his kingdom, his

loving regard for Saul's memory, and his demeanour in the face of

rebellion.

I. David was now about thirty years old, and had had his character

tested and matured by his hard experiences. He learned in suffering

what he taught in song.' Exile, poverty, and danger are harsh but

effectual teachers, if accepted by a devout spirit, and fronted with

brave effort. The fugitive's cave was a good preparation for the king's

palace. The throne to which he was called was no soft seat for repose.

The Philistine invasion had torn away all the northern territory. He

took the helm in a tempest. What was he to do? Ziklag was untenable;

where was he to take his men? He could not stop in the Philistine

territory, and he saw no way clear.

God's servants generally find that their promotion means harder duties

and multiplied perplexities. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.'

David did what we shall do, if we are wise--he asked God to guide him.

How that guidance was asked and given we are not here told; but the

analogy of 1 Samuel xxx. 7, 8, suggests that it was by the Urim and

Thummim, interpreted by the high-priest. The form of inquiry seems to

have been that a course of action, suggested by the inquirer, was

decided for him by a Yes' or a No.' So that there was the exercise of

common-sense and judgment in formulating the proposed course, as well

as that of God's direction in determining it.

That is how we still get divine direction. Bring your own wits to bear

on your action, and then do not obstinately stick to what seems right

to you, but ask God to negative it if it is wrong, and to confirm you

in it if it is right. If we humbly ask Him, Am I to go, or not to go?'

we shall not be left unanswered. We note the contrast between David's

submission to God's guidance and Saul's self-willed taking his own way,

in spite of Samuel. He began right, and, in the main, he continued as

he began. Self-will is sin and ruin. Submission is joy, and peace, and

success. God's kings are viceroys. They have to rule themselves and the

world, but they have to be ruled by His will. If they faithfully

continue as His servants, they are masters of all besides.

Hebron was a good capital for the new king, for it was a defensible

position, in the centre of his own tribe, and sacred by association

with the patriarchs. Established there, David was recognised as king by

his fellow-tribesmen, and by them only. No doubt, tribal jealousy was

partly the cause of this limited recognition, but probably the

confusion incident to the Philistine victory contributed to it. The

result was that, though David's designation by Samuel to the kingship

was universally known, and his candidature had been popular, he had

seven years of precarious sway over this mere fraction of the nation.

We read of no impatience on his part. He let events shape themselves,

or, rather, he let God shape events.

Passiveness is not always indolence. There are two ways of compassing

our desires. One is that which David himself tells us is the young

lions' way, of struggling and fighting, and that often ends in lacking

and suffering hunger'; the other is that of waiting on the Lord, and

that always ends in not lacking any good.' If we are sure that God has

promised us anything, and if He does not seem to have yet opened the

way to obtaining it, our strength is to sit still.' If He has given us

Hebron, we can be patient till He please to give us Jerusalem.

II. Another side of David's character comes beautifully out in his

treatment of the men of Jabesh-gilead. That town owed much to Saul (1

Samuel xi.), and its gratitude lasted, and dared much for him. It was a

brave dash that they made across Jordan to carry off Saul's corpse from

its ignominious exposure; for it both defied the Philistines, and might

be construed as hostile to David. But his heart was too true to ancient

friendship to do anything but glow with admiring sympathy at that

exhibition of affectionate remembrance. Reconciling death had swept

away all memories of Saul's insane jealousy, and he owned a brother in

every one who showed kindness to the unfortunate king.

If the Jabesh-Gileadites are a pattern of long-memoried gratitude,

David's commendation of them is a model of love which survives

injuries, and of forgivingness which forgets them. It was as politic as

it was generous. Nothing could have been better calculated to attach

Saul's most devoted partisans to him than showing that he honoured

their faithful attachment to Saul, and nothing could have more clearly

defined his own position during his wanderings as being no rebel. The

dictates of true policy and those of devout generosity always coincide.

It is ever a blunder to be unforgiving, and mercifulness is always

expedient.

But David did not hide his claim to the allegiance of these true

hearts. He called on them to transfer their loyalty to himself, and he

asserted, not his anointing by Samuel, but his recognition by Judah,

the premier tribe, as the motive. No doubt the divine appointment is

implied, as it was generally known, but Judah's action is put forward

as showing the beginning of the realisation of the divine designation.

The men of Jabesh needed to be valiant' if they were to acknowledge

him; for it was a far cry to Hebron, and the forces of the rival son of

Saul were overrunning the northern districts.

We have to take our sides in the age-long and worldwide warfare between

God's King and the pretenders to His throne, and it often wants much

courage to do so when surrounded by antagonists. It seems a long way

off to the true monarch, and Abner's army is a very solid reality, and

very near. But it is safest to take the side of the distant, rightful

king.

III. David's bearing in the face of opposition and rebellion comes out

in verses 8-11. Abner, Saul's cousin, who had been in high position

when the stripling from Bethlehem fought Goliath, was not capable of

the self-effacement involved in acquiescing in David's accession,

though he knew that the Lord had sworn to David.' So he set up a King

Do-nothing' in the person of a weak lad, the only survivor of Saul's

sons. A strange state of mind that, which struggles against a

recognised divine appointment!

But is it only Abner who knew that he was trying to thwart God's will?

Thousands of us are doing the same, and the attempt answers as well as

it did in his case.

The puppet king is named Ishbosheth in the lesson, but I Chronicles

viii. 33 and ix. 39 show that his real name was Esh-baal. The former

word means The man of shame'; the latter, The man of Baal.' The

existence of Baal as an element in names seems to indicate the

incompleteness of the emancipation from idolatry in Saul's time, and

the change will then indicate the keener monotheistic conscience of

later days. Another explanation is that Baal (' Lord') was in these

cases used as a name for Jehovah, and was changed at a later period for

the purpose of avoiding what was interpreted then as a compound of the

name of the Phoenician deity Baal' (Driver, Notes on Hebrew Text of the

Books of Samuel).

Abner set up his tool in Mahanaim, sacred for its associations with

Jacob, but, no doubt, recommended to him rather by its position on the

east side of Jordan, safe from the attacks of the victorious

Philistines. From that fastness he made raids to recover the territory

which the victory at Gilboa had won for them. First Gilead, on the same

side of the river as Mahanaim; then the territory of the Ashurites'--

probably a scribe's error for Asherites,' the most northern tribe; and

then, coming southward, the great plain, with its cities, Ephraim and

Benjamin,--in fact, all Israel except Judah's country was reconquered

for Saul's house.

The account of the distribution of territory between the two monarchies

is broken by the parenthesis in verse 10, which, both by its awkward

interposition in the middle of a sentence and by its difficult

chronological statements, looks like a late addition.

For seven and a half years David reigned in Hebron, but was rather shut

up there than ruling thence. The most noteworthy fact is that he,

soldier as he was, took no steps to put down Abner's rebellion. He

defended himself when attacked, but that was all. The three figures of

David, Ishbosheth, and Abner point lessons. Silent, still, trustful,

and therefore patient, David shows us how faith in God can lead to

possessing one's soul in patience till the vision' comes. We may have

to wait for it, but it will surely come,' and what is time enough for

God should be time enough for us. Saul's son was a poor, weak creature,

who would never have thought of resisting David but for the stronger

will behind him. To be weak is, in this world full of tempters, to

drift into being wicked. We have to learn betimes to say No,' and to

stick to it. Moral weakness attracts tempters as surely as a camel

fallen by the caravan track draws vultures from every corner of the

sky. The fierce soldier who fought for his own hand while professing to

be moved by loyalty to the dead king, may stand as a type of the

self-deception with which we gloss over our ugliest selfishness with

fine names, and for an instance of the madness which leads men to set

themselves against God's plans, and therefore to be dashed in pieces,

as some slim barrier reared across the track of a train would be. To

rush against the thick bosses of the Almighty's buckler' does no harm

to the buckler, but kills the insane assailant.

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ONE FOLD AND ONE SHEPHERD

Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake,

saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh. 2. Also in time past,

when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and

broughtest in Israel: and the Lord said to thee, Thou shalt feed My

people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel. 3. So all the

elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron; and king David made a

league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David

king over Israel. 4. David was thirty years old when he began to reign;

and he reigned forty years. 5. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven

years and six months; and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three

years over all Israel and Judah, 6. And the king and his men went to

Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land; which spake

unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou

shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. 7.

Nevertheless, David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city

of David. 8. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the

gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are

hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they

said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house. 9. So David

dwelt in the fort, and called it the city of David. And David built

round about from Millo and inward. 10. And David went on, and grew

great, and the Lord God of hosts was with him. 11. And Hiram king of

Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and

masons: and they built David an house. 12. And David perceived that the

Lord had established him king over Israel, and that He had exalted his

kingdom for His people Israel's sake.'--2 SAMUEL v. 1-12.

The dark day on Gilboa put the Philistines in possession of most of

Saul's kingdom. Only in the south David held his ground, and Abner had

to cross Jordan to find a place of security for the remnants of the

royal house. The completeness of the Philistine conquest is marked, not

only by Abner's flight to Mahanaim, but by the reckoning that David

reigned for seven and a half years and Ishbosheth two; for these

periods must be supposed to have ended very nearly at the same time,

and thus there would be about five years before the invaders were so

far got rid of that Ishbosheth exercised sovereignty over his part of

Israel. It is singular that David should have been left unattacked by

the Philistines, and it is probably to be explained by the friendly

relations which had sprung up between Achish, king of Gath, and him (1

Samuel xxix.). However that may be, his power was continually

increasing during his reign at Hebron over Judah, and at last Abner's

death and the assassination of the poor phantom king, Ishbosheth,

brought about the total collapse of opposition.

I. This passage deals first with the submission of the tribes and the

reunion of the divided kingdom. A comparison of verse 1 with verse 3

shows that a formal delegation of elders from all the tribes which had

held by Ishbosheth, came to Hebron with their submission. The account

in I Chronicles is a verbatim copy of this one, with the addition of a

glowing picture of the accompanying feasting and joy. It also places

much emphasis on the sincerity of David's new subjects, which needed

some endorsement; for loyalty which has been disloyal as long as it

durst, may be suspected. The elders have their mouths full of excellent

reasons for recognising David's kingship,--he is their brother; he was

their true leader in war, even in Saul's time; he has been appointed by

God to be king and commander. Unfortunately, it had taken the elders

seven and a half years to feel the force of these reasons, and probably

their perceptions would still have remained dull if Abner and

Ishbosheth had lived. But David is both magnanimous and politic, and

neither bloodshed nor reproaches mar the close of the strife. Seldom

has so formidable a civil war been ended with so complete an amnesty.

Observe the expression that David made a league with them. . . before

the Lord.' The Israelitish monarch was no despot, but, in modern

language, a constitutional king, between whom and his subjects there

was a compact, which he as well as they had to observe. In what sense

was it made before the Lord'? The ark was not at Hebron, though the

priests were; and the phrase is at once a testimony to the religious

character of the league' and to the consciousness of God's presence,

apart from the symbol of His presence. It points to a higher conception

than that which brought the ark to Ebenezer, and dreamed that the ark

had brought God to the army. Modern theories of the religious

development of the Old Testament ask us to recognise these two

conceptions as successive. The fact is that they were contemporaneous,

and that the difference between them is not one of time, but of

spiritual susceptibility. Who anointed David for this third time?

Apparently the elders, for priests are not mentioned. Samuel had

anointed him, as token of the divine choice and symbol of the divine

gifts for his office. The men of Judah had anointed him, and finally

the elders did so, in token of the popular confirmation of God's

choice.

So David has reached the throne at last. Schooled by suffering, and in

the full maturity of his powers, enriched by the singularly varied

experiences of his changeful life, tempered by the swift alternations

of heat and cold, polished by friction, consolidated by heavy blows, he

has been welded into a fitting instrument for God's purposes. Thus does

He ever prepare for larger service. Thus does He ever reward patient

trust. Through trials to a throne is the law for all noble lives in

regard to their earthly progress, as well as in regard to the relation

between earth and heaven. But David is not only a pattern instance of

how God trains His servants, but he is a prophetic person; and in his

progress to his kingdom we have dimly, but really, shadowed the path by

which his Son and Lord attains to His,--a path thickly strewn with

thorns, and plunging into valleys of the shadow of death' compared with

which David's darkest hour was sunny. The psalms of the persecuted

exile have sounding through them a deeper sorrow; for they testified

beforehand the sufferings of Christ.' No cross, no crown,' is the

lesson of David's earlier life.

II. We have, next, the first victory of the reunited nation. Hebron was

too far south for the capital of the whole kingdom. Jerusalem was more

central, and, from its position, surrounded on three sides with steep

ravines, was a strong military post. David's soldier's eye saw its

advantages; and he, no doubt, desired to weld the monarchy together by

participation in danger and triumph. The new glow of national unity

would seek some great exploit, and would resent as an insult the

presence of the Jebusites in their stronghold. The attack on it

immediately follows the recognition of David's kingship. It is not

necessary here to discuss the difficulties in verses 6-8; but we note

that they give, first, the insolent boast of the besieged, then the

twofold answer to it in fact and in word, and last, the memorial of the

victory in a proverb. Apparently the Jebusites' taunt is best

understood as in the margin of the Revised Version,' Thou shalt not

come in hither, but the blind and the lame shall turn thee away,' They

were so sure that their ravines made them safe, that they either

actually manned their walls with blind men and cripples, or jeeringly

shouted to the enemy across the valley that these would do for a

garrison. The other possible meaning of the words as they stand in the

Authorised Version would make the blind and lame' refer to David's men,

and the taunt would mean, You will have to weed out your men. It will

take sharper eyes and more agile limbs than theirs to clamber up here';

but the former explanation is the more probable. Such braggart speeches

were quite in the manner of ancient warfare.

Verse 7 tells what the answer to this mocking shout from the ramparts

was, David did the impossible, and took the city. Courage built on

faith has a way of making the world's predictions of what it cannot do

look rather ridiculous. David wastes no words in answering the taunt;

but it stirs him to fierce anger, and nerves him and his men for their

desperate charge. The obscure words in verse 8, which he speaks to his

soldiers, do not need the supplement given in the Authorised Version.

The king's quick eye had seen a practical path for scaling the cliffs

up some watercourse, where there might be projections or vegetation to

pull oneself up by, or shelter which would hide the assailants from the

defenders; and he bids any one who would smite the Jebusites take that

road up, and, when he is up, smite.' He heartens his men for the

assault by his description of the enemy. They had talked about blind

and lame'; that is what they really are, or as unable to stand against

the Israelites' fierce and sudden burst as if they were: and

furthermore, they are' hated of David's soul.' It is a flash of the

rage of battle which shows us David in a new light. He was a born

captain as well as king; and here he exhibits the general's power to

see, as by instinct, the weak point and to hurl his men on it. His

swift decision and fiery eloquence stir his men's blood like the sound

of a trumpet. The proverb that rose from the capture is best read as in

the Revised Version: There are the blind and the lame; he cannot come

into the house.' The point of it seems to be that, notwithstanding the

bragging Jebusites, he did come into the house'; and so its use would

be to ridicule boasting confidence that was falsified by events, as the

Jebusites' had been. It was worth while to record the boast and its

end; for they teach the always seasonable lesson of the folly of

over-confidence in apparently impregnable defences. It is a lesson of

worldly prudence, but still more of religion. There is always some

watercourse' overlooked by us, up which the enemy may make his way.

Overestimate of our own strength and its companion folly, flippant

underestimate of the enemy's power, are, in all worldly affairs, the

sure precursors of disaster; and in the Christian life the only safe

temper is that of the man who feareth always,' as knowing his own

weakness and the strength of his foe, and thereby is driven to that

trust which casts out fear.

On the other hand, David's exploit reads us anew the lesson that to the

Christian soldier there is nothing impossible, with Jesus Christ for

our Captain. There are many unconquered fortresses of evil still to be

carried by assault, and they look steep and inaccessible enough; but

there is some way up, and He will show it us. For our own personal

struggle with sin, and for the Church's conflict with social evils,

this story is an encouragement and a prophecy.

Jerusalem was captured by a reunited nation with its king at its head.

As long as our miserable divisions weaken and disgrace us, the Church

fights at a disadvantage; and the hoary fortresses of the foe will not

be won till Judah ceases to vex Ephraim, and Ephraim no more envies

Judah, but all Christ's servants in one host, with the King known by

each to be with them, make the assault.

III. We have, lastly, the growth of the kingdom. I pass over

topographical questions, which need not concern us here. The points

recorded are David's establishment in the stronghold, his additions to

the city, his increasing greatness and its reason in the presence and

favour of the God of hosts,' the special instance of this in the

friendly intercourse with Hiram of Tyre and the employment of Tyrian

workmen, and the recognition of the source and the purpose of his

prosperity by the devout king. We see here the conditions of true

success,--The Lord, the God of hosts, was with him.' We see also the

right use of it,--David perceived that the Lord had established him

king.' He was not puffed up into self-importance by his elevation, but

devoutly and clearly saw who had set him in his lofty place. And, as he

traced his royalty to God, so he recognised that he had received it,

not for himself, but as a trust to be used, not in self-indulgence, but

for the national good,--and that He had exalted his kingdom for His

people Israel's sake.' Whosoever holds firmly by these two thoughts,

and lives them, will adorn his position, whatever it may be, and will

be one of God's crowned kings, however obscure his lot and small his

duties. He who lacks them will misuse his gifts and mar his life, and

the more splendid his endowments and the higher his position, the more

conspicuous will be his ruin and the heavier his guilt.

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DEATH AND LIFE FROM THE ARK

Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty

thousand. 2. And David arose, and went with all the people that were

with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God,

whose name is called by the name of the Lord of hosts that dwelleth

between the cherubims. 3. And they set the ark of God upon a new cart,

and brought it out of the house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah: and

Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drave the new cart. 4. And they

brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah,

accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark. 5. And David

and all the house of Israel played before the Lord on all manner of

instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on

timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals. 6. And when they came to

Nachon's thrashing-floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God,

and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. 7. And the anger of the

Lord was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error;

and there he died by the ark of God. 8. And David was displeased,

because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name

of the place Perez-uzzah to this day. 9. And David was afraid of the

Lord that day, and said, How shall the ark of the Lord come to me? 10.

So David would not remove the ark of the Lord unto him into the city of

David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obed-edom the

Gittite. 11. And the ark of the Lord continued in the house of

Obed-edom the Gittite three months: and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and

all his household. 12. And it was told king David, saying, The Lord

hath blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that pertaineth unto him,

because of the ark of God. So David went and brought up the ark of God

from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David with gladness.'--2

SAMUEL vi. 1-12.

I. The first section (verses 1-5) describes the joyful reception and

procession. The parallel account in 1 Chronicles states that Baalah, or

Baale, was Kirjath-jearim. Probably the former was the more ancient

Canaanitish name, and indicates that it had been a Baal sanctuary. If

so, the presence of the ark there was at once a symbol and an omen,

showing Jehovah's conquest over the obscene and bloody gods of the

land, and forecasting His triumph over all the gods of the nations.

Every Baale shall one day be a resting-place of the ark of God. The

solemn designation of the ark, as called by the Name, the name of the

Lord of Hosts, that dwelleth between the cherubim,' is significant on

this, its reappearance after so long eclipse, and, by emphasising its

awful sanctity, prepares for the incidents which are to follow. The

manner of the ark's transport was irregular; for the law strictly

enjoined its being carried by the Levites by means of bearing-poles

resting on their shoulders; and the copying of the Philistines' cart,

though a new one was made for the purpose, indicates the desuetude into

which the decencies of worship had fallen in seventy years. In 1

Chronicles, the singular words in verse 5, which describe David as

playing before the Lord on the very unlikely things for such a

purpose,' all manner of instruments of fir wood,' become with all their

might: even with songs' which seems much more reasonable. A slight

alteration in three letters and the transposition of two would bring

our text into conformity with I Chronicles, and the conjectural

emendation is tempting. Who ever heard of fir-wood musical instruments?

The specified ones which follow were certainly not made of it, and

songs could scarcely fail to be mentioned.

At all events, we see the glad procession streaming out of the little

city buried among its woods; the cart drawn by meek oxen, and loaded

with the unadorned wooden chest, in the midst; the two sons or

descendants of its faithful custodian honoured to be the teamsters; the

king with the harp which had cheered him in many a sad hour of exile;

and the crowd making a joyful noise before the Lord,' which might sound

discord in our ears, as some lifted up shrill songs, some touched

stringed instruments, some beat on timbrels, some rattled metal rods

with movable rings, and some clashed cymbals together. It was a wild

scene, in which there was a dangerous resemblance to the frantic

jubilations of idolatrous worship. No doubt there were true hearts in

that crowd, and none truer than David's. No doubt we have to beware of

applying our Christian standards to these early times, and must let a

good deal that is sensuous and turbid pass, as, no doubt, God let it

pass. But confession of sin in leaving the ark so long forgotten would

have been better than this tumultuous joy; and if there had been more

trembling in it, it would not have passed so soon into wild terror.

Still, on the other hand, that rejoicing crowd does represent, though

in crude form, the effect which the consciousness of God's presence

should ever have. His felt nearness should be, as the Psalmist says,

the gladness of my joy.' Much of our modern religion is far too gloomy,

and it is thought to be a sign of devotion and spiritual-mindedness to

be sad and of a mortified countenance. Unquestionably, Christianity

brings men into the continual presence of very solemn truths about

themselves and the world which may well sober them, and make what the

world calls mirth incongruous.

There is no music in the life

That rings with idiot laughter solely.'

But the Man of Sorrows said that His purpose for us was that His joy

might remain in us, and that our joy might be full'; and we but

imperfectly apprehend the gospel if we do not feel that its joys much

more abound' than its sorrows, and that they even burn brightest, like

the lights on safety-buoys, when drenched by stormy seas.

II. The second section contains the dread vindication of the sanctity

of the ark, which changed joy into terror, and silenced the songs. At

some bad place in the rocky and steep track, the oxen stumbled or were

restive. The spot is called in Samuel the threshing-floor of Nachon,'

but in Chronicles the owner is named Chidon.' As the former word means

a stroke' and the latter destruction,' they are probably not to be

taken as proper names, but as applied to the place after this event.

The name given by David, however--Perez-uzzah--proved the more

permanent to this day.' Uzzah, who was driving while his brother went

in front to pilot the way, naturally stretched out his hand to steady

his freight, just as if it had been a sack of corn; and, as if he had

touched an electric wire, fell dead, as the story graphically says, by

the ark of God.' What confusion and panic would agitate the joyous

singers, and how their songs would die on their lips!

What harm was there in Uzzah's action? It was most natural, and, in one

point of view, commendable. Any careful waggoner would have done the

same with any valuable article he had in charge. Yes; that was just the

point of his error and sin, that he saw no difference between the ark

and any other valuable article. His intention to help was right enough;

but there was profound insensibility to the awful sacredness of the

ark, on which even its Levitical bearers were forbidden to lay hands.

All his life Uzzah had been accustomed to its presence. It had been one

of the familiar pieces of furniture in Abinadab's house, and, no doubt,

familiarity had had its usual effect. Do none of us ministers,

teachers, and others, to whom the gospel and the worship and ordinances

of the Church have been familiar from infancy, treat them in the same

fashion? Many a hand is laid on the ark, sometimes to keep it from

falling, with more criminal carelessness of its sacredness than Uzzah

showed. Note, too, how swiftly an irreverent habit of treating holy

things grows. The first error was in breaking the commanded order for

removal of the ark by the Levites. Once in the cart, the rest follows.

The smallest breach in the feeling of awe and reverence will soon lead

to more complete profanation. There is nothing more delicate than the

sense of awe. Trifled with ever so little, it speedily disappears.

There is far too little of it in our modern religion. Perfect love

casts out fear and deepens awe which hath not torment.

Was not the punishment in excess of the sin? We must remember the

times, the long neglect of the ark, the decay of religion in Saul's

reign, the critical character of the moment as the beginning of a new

era, when it was all-important to print deep the impression of

sanctity, and the rude material which had to be dealt with; and we must

not forget that God, in His punishments, does not adopt men's ideas of

death as such a very dreadful thing. Many since have followed in

David's wake, and been displeased, because the Lord broke forth upon

Uzzah'; but he and they have been wrong. He ought to have known better,

and to have understood the lesson of the solemn corpse that lay there

by the ark; instead of which he gives way to mere terror, and was

afraid of the Lord.' David afraid of the Lord! What had become of the

rapturous love and strong trust which ring clear through his psalms? Is

this the man who called God his rock and fortress and deliverer, his

buckler and the horn of his salvation and his high tower, and poured

out his soul in burning words, which glow yet through all the centuries

and the darkness of earth? It was ill for David to fall thus below

himself, but well for us that the eclipse of his faith and love should

be recorded, to hearten us, when the like emotions fall asleep in our

souls. His consciousness of impurity was wholesome and sound, but his

cowering before the ark, as if it were the seat of arbitrary anger,

which might flame out destruction for no discernible reason, was a

woful darkening of his loving insight into the heart of God.

III. The last section (verses 10-12) gives us the blessings on the

house of Obed-edom and the glad removal of the ark to Jerusalem.

Obed-edom is called a Gittite,' or man of Gath; but he does not appear

to have been a Philistine immigrant, but a native of another Gath, a

Levitical city, and himself a Levite. There is an Obededom in the lists

of David's Levites in Chronicles who is probably the same man. He did

not fear to receive the ark, and, worthily received, the presence which

had been a source of disaster and death to idolaters, to profanely

curious pryers into its secret, and to presumptuous irreverence, became

a fountain of unbroken blessing. This twofold effect of the same

presence is but a symbol of a solemn law which runs through all life,

and is especially manifest in the effects of Christ's work upon men.

Everything has two handles, and it depends on ourselves by which of

them we lay hold of it, and whether we shall receive a shock that

kills, or blessings. The same circumstances of poverty, or wealth, or

sorrow, or temptation, make one man better and another worse. The same

presence of God will be to one man a joy; to another, a terror. What

maketh heaven, that maketh hell.' The same gospel received is the

fountain of life, purity, peace; and, rejected or neglected, is the

source of harm and death. Jesus Christ is set for the fall and rising

again of many.' Either He is the savour of life unto life, the rock on

which we build, or He is the savour of death unto death, the stone on

which we stumble and break our limbs.

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THE ARK OF THE HOUSE OF OBED-EDOM

The ark of the Lord continued in the house of Obed-edom the Gittite

three months; and the Lord blessed Obed-edom, and all his

household.'--2 SAMUEL vi.11.

Nearly seventy years had elapsed since the capture of the ark by the

Philistines on the fatal field of Aphek. They had carried it and set it

in insolent triumph in the Temple of Dagon, as if to proclaim that the

Jehovah of Israel was the conquered prisoner of the Philistine god. But

the morning showed Dagon's stump prone on the threshold. And so the

terrified priests got rid of their dangerous trophy as swiftly as they

could. From one Philistine city to another it passed, and everywhere

its presence was marked by disease and calamity. So at last they

huddled it into some rude cart, leaving the draught-oxen to drag it

whither they would. They made straight for the Judaean hills, and in

the first little village were welcomed by the inhabitants at their

harvest, as they saw them coming across the plain. But again death

attended the Presence, and curiosity, which was profanity, was

punished. So the villagers were as eager to get rid of the ark as they

had been to welcome it, and they passed it on to the little city of

Kirjath-jearim, the city of the woods,' as the name means, or, as we

might say, Woodville.' And there it lay, neglected and all but

forgotten, for nearly seventy years. But as soon as David was

established in his newly-won capital he set himself to reorganise the

national worship, which had fallen into neglect and almost into disuse.

The first step was to bring the ark. And so he passed with a joyful

company to Kirjath. But again swift death overtakes Uzzah with his

irreverent hand. And David shrinks, in the consciousness of his

impurity, and bestows the symbol of the awful Presence in the house of

Obed-edom. As we have already noted, he was probably not a Philistine,

as the name Gittite' at first sight suggests. There is an Obed-edom in

the lists of David's Levites, who was an inhabitant of another Gath,

and himself of the tribe of Levi.

He was not afraid to receive the ark. There were no idols, no

irreverent curiosity, no rash presumption in his house. He feared and

served the God of the ark, and so the Presence, which had been a source

of disaster to the unworthy, was a source of unbroken blessing to him

and to his household.

I have been the more particular in this enumeration of the wanderings

of the ark and the opposite effects which its presence produced

according to the manner of its reception, because these effects are

symbols of a great truth which runs all through human life, and is most

especially manifested in the message and the mission of Jesus Christ.

Let us, then, just trace out two or three of the spheres in which we

may see the application of this great principle, which makes life so

solemn and so awful, which may make it so sad or so glad, so base or so

noble.

I. First, then, note the twofold operation of all God's outward

dealings.

Everything that befalls us, every object with which we come in contact,

all the variety of condition, all the variations of our experience,

have one distinct and specific purpose. They are all meant to tell upon

character, to make us better in sundry ways, to bring us closer to God,

and to fill us more full of Him. And that one effect may be produced by

the most opposite incidents, just as in some great machine you may have

two wheels turning in opposite ways, and yet contributing to one

resulting motion; or, just as the summer and the winter, with all their

antitheses, have a single result in the abundant harvest. One force

attracts the planet to the sun, one force tends to drive it out into

the fields of space; but the two, working together, make it circle in

its orbit around its centre. And so, by sorrow and by joy, by light and

by dark, by giving and withholding, by granting and refusing, by all

the varieties of our circumstances, and by everything that lies around

us, God works to prepare us for Himself and to polish His instruments,

sometimes plunging the iron into baths of hissing tears,' and sometimes

heating it hot with hopes and fears,' and sometimes battering' it with

the shocks of doom,' but all for the one purpose --that it may be a

polished shaft in His quiver.

And whilst, thus, the most opposite things may produce the same effect,

the same thing will produce opposite effects according to the way in

which we take it. There is nothing that can be relied upon to do a man

only good; there is nothing about which we need fear that its mission

is only to do evil. For all depends on the recipient, who can make

everything to fulfil the purpose for which God has sent him everything.

Here are two men tried by the same poverty. It beats the one down,

makes him squalid, querulous, faithless, irreligious, drives him to

drink, crushes him; and the other man it steadies and quiets and

hardens, and teaches him to look beyond the things seen and temporal to

the exceeding riches at God's right hand.

Here are two men tried by wealth; the gold gets into the one man's

veins and makes him yellow as with jaundice, and kills him, destroying

all that is noble, generous, impulsive, quenching his early dreams and

enthusiasms, closing his heart to sweet charity, puffing him up with a

false sense of Importance, and laying upon him the dreadful

responsibility of misused and selfishly employed possessions. And the

other man, tried in the same fashion, out of his wealth makes for

himself friends that welcome him into everlasting habitations, and lays

up for himself treasures in heaven. The one man is damned and the other

man is saved by their use of the same thing.

Here are two men subjected to the same sorrows; the one is absorbed by

his selfish regard to his own misery, blinded to all the blessings that

still remain, made negligent of tasks and oblivious of the plainest

duty. And he goes about saying, Oh, if thou hadst been here!' or if, if

something else had happened, then this would not have happened. And the

other man, passing through the same circumstances, finds that, when his

props are taken away, he flings himself on God's breast, and, when the

world becomes dark and all the paths dim about him, he looks up to a

heaven that fills fuller of meek and swiftly gathering stars as the

night falls, and he says, It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him

good.'

Here are two men tried by the same temptation; it leads the one man

away captive with a dart through his liver'; the other man by God's

grace overcomes it, and is the stronger and the sweeter and the gentler

and the humbler because of the dreadful fight. And so you might go the

whole round of diverse circumstances, and about each of them find the

same double result. Nothing is sure to do a man good; nothing

necessarily does him hurt. All depends upon the man himself, and the

use he makes of what God in His mercy sends. Two plants may grow in the

same soil, be fed by the same dews and benediction from the heavens, be

shone upon by the same sunshine, and the one of them will elaborate

from all, sweet juices and fragrance, and the other will elaborate a

deadly poison. So, my brother, life is what you and I will to make it,

and the events which befall us are for our rising or our falling

according as we determine they shall be, and according as we use them.

Think, then, how solemn, how awful, how great a thing it is to stand

here a free agent, able to determine my character and my condition,

surrounded by all these circumstances and the subject of all these wise

and manifold divine dealings, in each of which there lie dormant, to be

evoked by me, tremendous possibilities of elevation even to the very

presence of God, or of sinking into the depths of separation from Him.

The ark of God, that overthrew Dagon and smote Uzzah, was nothing but a

fountain of blessing in the household of Obed-edom.

II. Secondly, note the twofold operation of God's character and

presence.

The ark was the symbol of a present God, and His presence is meant to

be the life and joy of all creatures, and the revelation of Him is

meant to be only for our good, giving strength, righteousness, and

peace. But the same double possibility which I have been pointing out

as inherent in all externals belongs here too, and a man can determine

to which aspect of the many-sided infinitude of the divine nature he

shall stand in relation. The glass in stained windows is so coloured as

that parts of it cut off, and prevent from passing through, different

rays of the pure white light. And men's moral natures, the inclination

of their hearts, and the set of their wills and energies, cut off, if I

may say so, parts of the infinite, white light of the many-sided divine

character, and put them into relations only with some part and aspect

of that great whole which we call God. The man that loves the world,

the man that is living for self, still more the man that is embruted in

the pig-sty of sensuality and vice, cannot see the God whom the pure

heart, which loves Him and is purified by its faith, discerns at the

centre of all things. But the lower man sees either some very far-off

Awfulness, in which he hopes vaguely that there is a kind of good

nature that will let him off; or, if he has been shaken out of that

superficial creed, which is only a creed for men whose consciences have

not been touched, then he can see only a God whose love darkens into

retribution, and who is the Judge and the Avenger. And no man can say

that such a conception is not part of the truth; but, alas! he on whom

the form of such a God glares has incapacitated himself, by his misuse

of his powers and of God's world, from seeing the beauty of the love of

the Father of us all, the righteous Father who in Christ loves every

man.

And thus the thought of God, the consciousness of His Presence, may be

like the ark which was its symbol, either dreadful and to be put away,

or to be welcomed and blessing to be drawn from it. To many of us I am

sure--though I do not know anything about many of you--that thought,'

Thou God seest me,' breeds feelings like the uneasy discomfort of a

prisoner when he knows that somewhere in the wall there is a spy-hole

at which at any moment a warder's eye may be. And to some of us,

blessed be His name, that same thought, Thou art near me,' seems to

bathe the heart in a sea of sweet rest, and to bring the assurance of a

divine Companion that cheers all the solitude. And why is the

difference? There are two people sitting in one pew; to the one man the

thought of God is his ghastliest doubt, to the other it is his deepest

joy. Wherefore? And which is it to me?

Then, again, this same duality of aspect attaches to the character and

presence of God in another way. Because, according to the variety of

men's characters, God is obliged to treat them as standing in different

relations. He must manifest His judgment, His justice, His punitive

justice. There is a solemn verse in one of the Psalms which I may quote

in lieu of all words of my own of this matter. With the merciful Thou

wilt show Thyself merciful, with the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure,

with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward.' The present God has

to modify His dealings according to the characters of men.

And so, dear friends, for the present life, and, as I believe, for the

next life in a far more emphatic and awful way, the same thing makes

blessedness and misery, the same thing makes life and death. The

sunshine will kill and wither the slimy plants that grow in the dark

recesses of some dripping cave; and if you take a fish out of the

water, the air clogs its gills and it dies. Bring a man, such as some

of you are, into a close, constant contact with the consciousness of

the divine righteousness and presence, and you want nothing else to

make a hell. The ark of the Lord will flash out its lightnings and

Uzzah will die. That great Infinite Being, before whom we stand, holds

in His right hand blessings beyond count or price, even the gift of

Himself, and in His left His lightnings and His arrows. On which hand

are you standing?

III. Lastly, note the twofold operation of God's gospel.

His dealings, His character and presence, and, most markedly and

eminently of all, the gospel that is treasured in Jesus Christ and

proclaimed amongst us, have this twofold operation. God sent His Son to

be the Saviour of the world. It was meant that His mission and message

should only be for life, and that with ever-increasing abundance. But

God cannot save men by magic, nor by indiscriminate bestowment of

spiritual blessings. It is not in His power to force His salvation upon

any one, and whether the Gospel shall turn out to be a man's salvation

or his ruin depends on the man himself. The preaching of the gospel and

your contact with it, if you have ever come into contact with it really

and not by mere outward hearing, leaves no man as it found him. My poor

words--and God knows how poor I feel them to be--leave none of you as

they find you; and that is what makes our meeting together so solemn

and awful, and sometimes weighs one down as with a sense of

insufficiency for these things.

That twofold operation is seen first in the permanent effects of the

Gospel upon character. If it has been offered to me, and if I accept

it, then blessings beyond all enumeration, and which none but they who

have them fully know, follow in its wake. Received by simple faith in

Jesus Christ, God's sacrifice for a world's sin, it brings to us the

clear consciousness of pardon, the calm sense of communion, the joyful

spirit of adoption, righteousness rooted in our hearts and to be

manifested day by day in our lives; it brings all elevation and

strengthening and ennobling for the whole nature, and is the one power

that makes us really men as God would have us all to be.

Rejected or neglected or passed by apparently without our having done

anything in regard to it, what are the issues? What does it do? Well,

it does this for one thing, it turns unconscious worldliness into

conscious worldliness. If the offer has been clearly before your minds,

Christ or the world?' and you have said I take the world!' you know

that you have made the choice, and the act will tell on your character.

Rejection strengthens all the evil motives for rejection, and adds to

the insensibility of the man who has rejected. The ice on our pavements

in the winter time, that melts on the surface in the day and freezes

again at night, becomes dense and slippery beyond all other. And a

heart, like that which beats in some of our bosoms, that has been

melted and then has frozen again, is harder than ever it was before.

Hammering that does not break solidifies and makes tougher the thing

that is struck. There are no men so hard to get at as men and women,

like multitudes of you, that have been hammered at by preaching ever

since they were children, and have not yielded their hearts to God. The

ark has done you hurt if it has not done you good.

I do not dwell upon the other solemn thought, of the harmful results of

contact with a gospel which we do not accept, as exemplified in the

increase of responsibility and the consequent increase of condemnation.

I only quote Christ's words, The servant that knew his Lord's will, and

did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.'

My brother, Christ's gospel is never inert, one thing or other it does

for every soul that it reaches. Either it softens or it hardens. Either

it saves or it condemns. This Child is set for the rise or for the fall

of many.' Jesus Christ may be for me and for you the Rock on which we

build. If He is not, He is the Stone against which we stumble and break

our limbs. Jesus Christ may be for you and for me the Pillar that gives

light by night to those on the one side; He either is that, or He is

the Pillar that sheds darkness and dismay on those on the other. Jesus

Christ and His Gospel may be to each of us the savour of life unto

life'; He either is that, or He is the savour of death unto death.' Oh!

dear friends, if you have neglected, turned away, delayed to receive

Him or have forgotten impressions in the midst of the whirl of daily

life, do not do so any longer. Take Him for yours, your Brother,

Friend, Sacrifice, Inspirer, Lord, Aim, End, Reward, and very Heaven of

Heaven. Take Him for your own by simple trusting; and say to Him,

Arise! O Lord, into Thy rest, Thou and the Ark of Thy strength.' So He

will come into your hearts and smile His gladness as He whispers: Here

will I dwell for ever; this is My rest, for I have desired it.'

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THE PROMISED KING AND TEMPLE-BUILDER

And it came to pass that night, that the word of the Lord came unto

Nathan, saying, 5. Go and tell My servant David, Thus saith the Lord,

Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in! 6. Whereas I have not

dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of

Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in

a tabernacle. 7. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the

children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel,

whom I commanded to feed My people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me

an house of cedar! 8. Now therefore so shalt thou say unto My servant

David, Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote,

from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel: 9.

And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all

thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like

unto the name of the great men that are in the earth. 10. Moreover I

will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that

they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall

the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime, 11.

And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people

Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the

Lord telleth thee that He will make thee an house. 12. And when thy

days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up

thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will

establish His kingdom. 13. He shall build an house for My name; and I

will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever. 14. I will be his

father, and He shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten

Him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:

16. But My mercy shall not depart away from Him, as I took it from

Saul, whom I put away before thee. 16. And thine home and thy kingdom

shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be

established for ever.'--2 SAMUEL vii. 4-16.

The removal of the ark to Jerusalem was but the first step in a process

which was intended to end in the erection of a permanent Temple. The

time for the next step appeared to David to have come when he had no

longer to fight for his throne. Rest from enemies should lead to larger

work for God, else repose will be our worst enemy, and peace will

degenerate into self-indulgent sloth. A devout heart will not be

content with personal comfort and dwelling in a house of cedar, while

the ark has but a tent for its abode. There should be a proportion

between expenditure on self and on religious objects. How many

professing Christians might go to school to David! Luxury at home and

niggardliness in God's work make an ugly pair, but, alas! a common one.

Nathan approved, as was natural. But he knew the difference between his

own thoughts and the word of the Lord' that came to him, and, like a

true man, he went in the morning and contradicted, by God's authority,

his own precipitate sanction of the king's proposal. Clearly, divine

communications were unmistakably distinguishable from the recipient's

own thoughts.

The divine message first negatives the intention to build a house. In 1

Chronicles a positive prohibition takes the place of the question in

verse 5, but that is only a difference of form, for the question

implies a negative answer. From David's last words (1 Chron. xxviii. 3)

we learn that a reason for the prohibition was because thou art a man

of war, and hast shed blood.' His wars were necessary, and tended to

establish the kingdom, but their existence showed that the time for

building the Temple had not come, and there was a certain incongruity

in a warrior king rearing a house for the God whose kingdom was in its

essence peace.

The prohibition rests on a deep insight into the nature of Jehovah's

reign, and draws a broad distinction between His worship and the

surrounding paganism. But the reason given in the text is very

remarkable. God did not desire a permanent Temple. If we may so say, He

preferred the less solid Tabernacle, as corresponding better to the

simplicity and spirituality of His worship. A gorgeous stone Temple

might easily become the sepulchre, rather than the shrine, of true

devotion. The movable tent answered to the temporary character of the

dispensation.' The more fixed and elaborate the externals of worship,

the more danger of the spirit being stifled by them. The Old Testament

worship was necessarily ceremonial, but here is a caveat against the

stiffening of ceremonial into stereotyped formalism.

The prohibition was accompanied by gracious and far-reaching promises,

designed to assure David of God's approbation of his motive, and to

open up to him the vision of the future and the wonders that should be.

We need say little about the retrospective part of the message (verses

8, 9 a). God had been the agent in all David's past, had lifted him

from the quiet following of his sheep, had given him rule, which was

but a delegated authority. Israel was My people,' and therefore he was

but an instrument in God's hand, and was not to govern by his own

fancies or for his own advantage.

Every devout man's life is the realisation of a plan of God's, and we

sin against ourselves as well as Him if we do not often let thankful

thoughts retrace all the way by which the Lord our God has led us.

With verse 9 b the prophecy turns to the future. David personally is

promised the continuance of God's help; then a permanent, peaceful

possession of the land is promised to the nation, and finally the

perpetuity of the kingdom in the Davidic line is promised. The prophecy

as to the nation, like all such prophecies, is contingent on national

obedience. The future of the kingdom will stand in blessed contrast

with the wild times of the Judges, if--and only if--Israel behaves as

My people' should.

But the main point of the prophecy is the promise to David's seed.' In

form it attaches itself very significantly to David's intention to

build a house for Jehovah. That would invert the true order, for

Jehovah was about to build a house, that is, a permanent posterity, for

David. God must first give before man can requite. All our relations to

Him begin with His free mercy to us. And our building for Him should

ever be the result of His building for us, and will, in some humble

way, resemble the divine beneficence by which it has been quickened

into action. The very foundation principles of Christian service are

expressed here, in guise fitted to the then epoch of revelation.

But the relation of the two things, God's building and Solomon's, is

not exhausted by such considerations. The consolidation of the monarchy

in David's family was an essential preliminary to the rearing of the

Temple. That work needed tranquil times, abundant resources, leisure,

and assured dominion. So the prophet goes on to promise that David

shall be succeeded by his seed,' who shall build the Temple.

Further, three great promises are given in reference to David's seed,--

a perpetual kingdom, a personal relation of sonship to Jehovah, and

paternal chastisement, if necessary, but no such departure of Jehovah's

mercy as had darkened the close of Saul's sad reign. Then, finally, the

assurance is reiterated of the perpetuity of David's house and throne.

The remarkable expression in verse 16, established before thee' (that

is, David), if it is the true reading, suggests a hint of the life

after death, and conceives of the long-dead king as in some manner

cognisant of the fortunes of his descendants. But the Septuagint reads

before Me,' and that reading is confirmed by verses 26 and 29, and by

Psalm lxxxix. 36 b.

Now it is clear that these promises were in part directed to, and

fulfilled in, Solomon. But it is as clear that the great promise of an

eternal dominion, which is emphatically repeated thrice, goes far

beyond him. We are obliged to recognise a second meaning in the

prophecy, in accordance with Old Testament usage, which often means by

seed' a line of successive generations of descendants. But no

succession of mortal men can reach to eternal duration.

Apart from the fact that the kingdom, in the form in which David's

descendants ruled over it, has long since crumbled away, the large

words of the promise must be regarded as inflated and exaggerated, if

by for ever' is only meant for long generations.' A seed,' or line of

perishable men, can only last for ever if it closes in a Person who is

not subject to the law of mortality. Unless we can with our hearts

rejoicingly confess, Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thy kingdom

is an everlasting kingdom,' we do not pierce to the full understanding

of Nathan's prophecy.

All the glorious prerogatives shadowed in it were but partially

fulfilled in Israel's monarchs. Their failures and their successes,

their sins and their virtues, equally declared them to be but shadowy

forerunners of Him in whom all that they at the best imperfectly aimed

at and possessed is completely and for ever fulfilled. They were

prophetic persons by their office, and pointed on to Him.

He has built the true Temple, in that His body is the seat of sacrifice

and of revelation, and the meeting-place of God and man, and inasmuch

as through Him we are built up into a spiritual house for an habitation

of God. In Him is fulfilled the great prophecy of My Servant the

Branch,' who shall build the Temple of the Lord' and be a Priest upon

His throne.' In Him, too, is fulfilled in highest truth the filial

relationship. The Israelitish kings were by office sons of God. He is

the Son in ineffable derivation and eternal unity of life with the

Father, and their communion is in closest oneness of will and mutual

interchange of love. In that filial relation lies the assurance of

Christ's everlasting kingdom, for the Father loveth the Son, and hath

given all things into His hand.'

The prophecy is echoed in many places of Scripture, and is ever taken

to refer to a single person. The angel of the annunciation moulded his

salutation to the meek Virgin on it, when he declared that her Son

shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give

unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the

house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end.'

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DAVID'S GRATITUDE

Then went king David in, and sat before the Lord, and he said, Who am

I, O Lord God? and what is my house, that Thou hast brought me

hitherto? 19. And this was yet a small thing in Thy sight, O Lord God;

but Thou hast spoken also of Thy servant's house for a great while to

come. And is this the manner of man, O Lord God? 20. And what can David

say more unto Thee? for Thou, Lord God, knowest Thy servant. 21. For

Thy word's sake, and according to Thine own heart, hast Thou done all

these great things, to make Thy servant know them. 22. Wherefore Thou

art great, O Lord God: for there is none like Thee, neither is there

any God besides Thee, according to all that we have heard with our

ears. 23. And what one nation in the earth is like Thy people, even

like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself, and to

make Him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for Thy

land, before Thy people, which Thou redeemedst to Thee from Egypt, from

the nations and their gods? 24. For Thou hast confirmed to Thyself Thy

people Israel to be a people unto Thee for ever: and Thou, Lord, art

become their God. 25. And now, O Lord God, the word that Thou hast

spoken concerning Thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it

for ever, and do as Thou hast said. 26. And let Thy name be magnified

for ever, saying, The Lord of hosts is the God over Israel; and let the

house of Thy servant David be established before Thee. 27. For Thou, O

Lord of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to Thy servant, saying, I

will build thee an house: therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart

to pray this prayer unto Thee. 28. And now, O Lord God, Thou art that

God, and Thy words be true, and Thou hast promised this goodness unto

Thy servant: 29. Therefore now let it please Thee to bless the house of

Thy servant, that it may continue for ever before Thee: for Thou, O

Lord God, hast spoken it: and with Thy blessing let the house of Thy

servant be blessed for ever.'--2 SAMUEL vii. 18-29.

God's promise by Nathan of the perpetuity of the kingdom in David's

house made an era in the progress of revelation. A new element was

thereby added to devout hope, and a new object presented to faith. The

prophecy of the Messiah entered upon a new stage, bearing a relation,

as its successive stages always did, to the history which supplies a

framework for it. Now, for the first time, He can be set forth as the

king of Israel; now the width of the promise, which at first embraced

the seed of the woman, and then was limited to the seed of Abraham, and

thereafter to the tribe of Judah, is still further limited to the house

of David. The beam is narrowed as it is focussed into greater

brilliance, and the personal Messiah begins to be faintly discerned in

words which are to have a partial, preparatory fulfilment, in itself

prophetic, in the collective Davidic monarchs whose office is itself a

prophecy. This passage is the wonderful burst of praise which sprang

from David's heart in answer to Nathan's words. In many of the Psalms

later than this prophecy we find clear traces of that expectation of

the personal Messiah, which gradually shaped itself, under divine

inspiration, in David, as contained in Nathan's message But this

thanksgiving prayer, which was the immediate reflection of the

astounding new message, has not yet penetrated its depth nor discovered

its rich contents, but sees in it only the promise of the continuance

of kingship in his descendants. We do not learn the fulness of God's

gracious promises on first hearing them. Life and experience and the

teaching of His Spirit are needed to enable us to count our treasure,

and we are richer than we know.

This prayer is a prose psalm outside the Psalter. It consists of two

parts,--a burst of astonished thanksgiving and a stream of earnest

petition, grasping the divine promise and turning it into a prayer.

I. Note the burst of thanksgiving (vs. 18-24). The ark dwelt in

curtains,' and into the temporary sanctuary went the king with his full

heart. The somewhat peculiar attitude of sitting, while he poured it

out to God, has offended some punctilious commentators, who will have

it that we should translate remained,' and not sat'; but there is no

need for the change. The decencies of public worship may require a

posture which expresses devotion; but individual communion is free from

such externals, and absorbed contemplation naturally disposes of the

body so as least to hinder the spirit. The tone of almost bewildered

surprise at the greatness of the gift is strong all through the prayer.

The man's breath is almost taken away, and his words are sometimes

broken, and throughout palpitating with emotion. Yet there is a plain

progress of feeling and thought in them, and they may serve as a

pattern of thanksgiving. Note the abrupt beginning, as if pent-up

feeling forced its way, regardless of forms of devotion. The first

emotion excited by God's great goodness is the sense of unworthiness. I

do not deserve it,' is the instinctive answer of the heart to any

lavish human kindness, and how much more to God's! I am not worthy of

the least of all the mercies,' springs to the devout lips most swiftly,

when gazing on His miracles of bestowing love. He must know little of

himself, and less of God, who is not most surely melted down to

contrition, which has no bitterness or pain in it, by the coals of

loving fire heaped by God on his head.

The consciousness of unworthiness passes, in verse 19, to adoring

contemplation of God's astounding mercy, and especially of the new

element in Nathan's prophecy,--the perpetuity of the Davidic

sovereignty in the dim, far-off future. Thankfulness delights to praise

the Giver for the greatness of His gift. Faith strengthens its hold of

its blessings by telling them over, as a miser does his treasure. To

recount them to God is the way to possess them more fully.

The difficult close of the verse cannot be discussed here. The law for

man' is nearer the literal meaning of the words than the manner of men'

(Rev. Ver.); and, unfortunately, man's manner is not the same as man's

law. But the usual explanations are unsatisfactory. We would hazard the

suggestion that this' means that which God has spoken of thy servant's

house,' and that to call it the law for man' is equivalent to an

expression of absolute confidence in the authority, universality, and

certain fulfilment of the promise. The speech of God is ever the law

for man, and this new utterance stands on a level with the older law,

and shall rule all mankind. The king's faith not only gazes on the

great words of promise, but sees them triumphant on earth.

Then in verse 20 comes another bend of the stream of praise. The more

full the heart, the more is it conscious of the weakness of all words.

The deepest praise, like the truest love, speaks best in silence. It is

blessed when, in earthly relations, we can trust our dear ones'

knowledge of us to interpret our poor words. It is more blessed when,

in our speech to God, we can feel that our love and faith are deeper

than our word, and that He does not judge them by it, but it by them.

Silence is His least injurious praise.'

Here, too, we may note the two instances, in this verse, of what runs

through the whole prayer,--David's avoidance of using I.' Except in the

lowly What am I?' at the beginning, it never occurs; but he calls

himself David' twice and Thy servant' ten times,--a striking, because

unconscious, proof of his lowly sense of unworthiness.

But he can say more; and what he does further say goes yet deeper than

his former words. The personal aspect of the promise retreats into the

background, and the ground of all God's mercy in His own heart' fills

the thoughts. Some previous promise, perhaps that through Samuel, is

referred to; but the great truth that God is His own motive, and that

His love is not drawn forth by our deserts, but wells up by its own

energy, like a perennial fountain, is the main thought of the verse.

God is self-moved to bless, and He blesses that we may know Him through

His gifts. The one thought is the central truth, level to our

apprehension, concerning His nature; the other is the key to the

meaning of all His workings. All comes to pass because He loves with a

self-originated love, and in order that we may know the motive and

principle of His acts. We can get no farther into the secret of God

than that. We need nothing more for peaceful acceptance of His

providences for ourselves and our brethren. All is from love; all is

for the manifestation of love. He who has learned these truths sits at

the centre and lives in light.

Verse 22 strikes a new note. The effect of God's dealing with David is

to magnify His name, to teach His incomparable greatness, and to

confirm by experience ancient words which celebrate it. The thankful

heart rejoices in hearsay being changed into personal knowledge. As we

have heard, so have we seen.' Old truths flash up into new meaning, and

only he who tastes and sees that God is good to him to-day really

enters into the sweetness of His recorded past goodness.

Note the widening of David's horizon in verses 23 and 24 to embrace all

Israel. His blessings are theirs. He feels his own relation to them as

the culmination of the long series of past deliverances, and at the

same time loses self in joy over Israel's confirmation as God's people

by his kingship. True thankfulness regards personal blessings in their

bearing on others, and shrinks from selfish use of them. Note, too, the

parallel, if we may call it so, between Israel and Israel's God, in

that there is none like Thee,' and by reason of its choice by this

incomparable Jehovah, no nation on earth is like Thy people, even like

Israel.'

Thus steadily does this model of thanksgiving climb up from a sense of

unworthiness, through adoration and gazing on its treasures, to God's

unmotived love as His impulse, and men's knowledge of that love as His

aim, and pauses at last, rapt and hushed, before the solitary loftiness

of the incomparable God, and the mystery of the love, which has

intertwined the personal blessings which it celebrates, with its great

designs for the welfare of the people, whose unique position

corresponds to the unapproachable elevation of its God.

II. Verses 25 to 29 are prayer built on promise and winged by

thankfulness. The whole of these verses are but the expansion of do as

Thou hast said.' But they are not vain repetitions. Rather they are the

outpourings of wondering thankfulness and faith, that cannot turn away

from dwelling on the miracle of mercy revealed to it unworthy. God

delights in the sweet monotony and persistence of such reiterated

prayers, each of which represents a fresh throb of desire and a renewed

bliss in thinking of His goodness. Observe the frequency and variety of

the divine names in these verses,--in each, one, at least: Jehovah God

(v. 25); Jehovah of hosts (v. 26); Jehovah of hosts, God of Israel (v.

27); Lord Jehovah (vs. 28, 29). Strong love delights to speak the

beloved name. Each fresh utterance of it is a fresh appeal to His

revealed nature, and betokens another wave of blessedness passing over

David's spirit as he thinks of God. Observe, also, the other repetition

of Thy servant,' which occurs in every verse, and twice in two of them.

The king is never tired of realising his absolute subjection, and feels

that it is dignity, and a blessed bond with God, that he should be His

servant. The true purpose of honour and office bestowed by God is the

service of God, and the name of servant' is a plea with Him which He

cannot but regard. Observe, too, how echoes of the promise ring all

through these verses, especially the phrases establish the house' and

for ever.' They show how profoundly David had been moved, and how he is

labouring, as it were, to make himself familiar with the astonishing

vista that has begun to open before his believing eyes. Well is it for

us if we, in like manner, seek to fix our thoughts on the yet grander

for ever' disclosed to us, and if it colours all our look ahead, and

makes the refrain of all our hopes and prayers.

But the main lesson of the prayer is that God's promise should ever be

the basis and measure of prayer. The mould into which our petitions

should run is, Do as Thou hast said.' Because God's promise had come to

David, therefore hath Thy servant found in his heart to pray this

prayer unto Thee.' There is no presumption in taking God at His word.

True prayer catches up the promises that have fallen from heaven, and

sends them back again, as feathers to the arrows of its petitions. Nor

does the promise make the prayer needless. We know that if we ask

anything according to His will, He heareth us'; and we know that we

shall not receive the promised blessings, which are according to His

will, unless we do ask. Let us seek to stretch our desires to the width

of God's promises, and to confine our wishes within their bounds.

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DAVID AND JONATHAN'S SON

And David said, is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul,

that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? 2. And there was of

the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had

called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he

said, Thy servant is he. 3. And the king said, Is there not yet any of

the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And

Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his

feet. 4. And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto

the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in

Lo-debar. 5. Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of

Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lo-debar., 6. Now when Mephibosheth,

the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on

his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he

answered, Behold thy servant! 7. And David said unto him. Fear not; for

I will surely shew then kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and

will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father: and thou shalt eat

bread at my table continually. 8. And he bowed himself, and said, What

is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?

9. Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I

hare given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all

his house. 10. Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall

till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy

master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son

shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty

servants. 11. Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my

lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As

for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of

the king's sons. 12. And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was

Micha: and all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto

Mephibosheth. 13. So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem: for he did eat

continually at the king's table; and was lame on both his feet.'--2

SAMUEL ix. 1-13.

This charming idyl of faithful love to a dead friend and generous

kindness comes in amid stories of battle like a green oasis in a

wilderness of wild rocks and sand. The natural sweetness and chivalry

of David's disposition, which fascinated all who had to do with him,

comes beautifully out in it, and it may well stand as an object lesson

of the great Christian duty of practical mercifulness.

I. So regarded, the narrative brings out first the motives of true

kindliness. Saul and three of his four sons had fallen on the fatal

field of Gilboa; the fourth, the weak Ishbosheth, had been murdered

after his abortive attempt at setting up a rival kingdom had come to

nothing. There were only left Saul's daughters and some sons by a

concubine. So low had the proud house sunk, while David was

consolidating his kingdom, and gaining victory wherever he went.

But neither his own prosperity, nor the absence of any trace of Saul's

legitimate male descendants, made him forget his ancient oath to

Jonathan. Years had not weakened his love, his sufferings at Saul's

hands had not embittered it. His elevation had not lifted him too high

to see the old days of lowliness, and the dear memory of the

self-forgetting friend whose love had once been an honour to the

shepherd lad. Jonathan's name had been written on his heart when it was

impressionable, and the lettering was as if graven on the rock for

ever.' A heart so faithful to its old love needed no prompting either

from men or circumstances. Hence the inquiry after any that is left of

the house of Saul' was occasioned by nothing external, but came welling

up from the depth of the king's own soul.

That is the highest type of kindliness which is spontaneous and

self-motived. It is well to be easily moved to beneficence either by

the sight of need or by the appeals of others, but it is best to kindle

our own fire, and be our own impulse to gracious thoughts and acts. We

may humbly say that human mercy then shows likest God's, when, in such

imitation as is possible, it springs in us, as His does in Him, from

the depths of our own being. He loves and is kind because He is God. He

is His own motive and law. So, in our measure, should we aim at

becoming.

But David's remarkable language in his questions to Ziba goes still

deeper in unfolding his motives. For he speaks of showing the kindness

of God' to any remaining of Saul's house. Now that expression is no

mere synonym for kindness exceeding great, but it unfolds what was at

once David's deepest motive and his bright ideal. No doubt, it may

include a reminiscence of the sacred obligation of the oath to

Jonathan, but it hallows David's purposed mercy' as the echo of God's

to him, and so anticipates the Christian teaching, Be ye merciful, even

as your Father is merciful.' We must receive mercy from Him before our

hearts are softened, so as to give it to others, just as the wire must

be charged from the electric source before it can communicate the

tingle and the light.

The best basis for the beneficent service of man is experience of the

mercy of God. Philanthropy has no roots unless it is planted in

religion. That is a lesson which this age needs. And the other side of

the thought is as true and needful; namely, that our religion' is not

pure and undefiled' unless it manifests itself in the service of man.

How serene and lofty, then, the ideal! How impossible ever to be too

forgiving or too beneficent! As your heavenly Father is,'--that is our

pattern. We have not shown our brother all the kindness which we owe

him unless we have shown him the kindness of God.'

II. The progress of the story brings out next the characteristics of

David's kindliness, and these may be patterns for us. Ziba does not

seem to be very communicative, and appears a rather unwilling witness,

who needs to have the truth extracted bit by bit. He evidently had

nothing to do with Mephibosheth, and was quite content that he should

be left obscurely stowed away across Jordan in the house of the rich

Machir (2 Sam. xvii. 27-29). Lo-debar was near Mahanaim, on the eastern

side of the river, where Ishbosheth's short-lived kingdom had been

planted, and probably the population there still clung to Saul's

solitary representative. There he lived so privately that none of

David's people knew whether he was alive or dead. Perhaps the savage

practice of Eastern monarchs, who are wont to get rid of rivals by

killing them, led the cripple son of Jonathan to lie low,' and Ziba's

reticence may have been loyalty to him. It is noteworthy that Ziba is

not said to have been sent to bring him, though that would have been

natural.

At any rate, Mephibosheth came, apparently dreading whether his summons

to court was not his death-warrant. But he is quickly reassured. David

again recalls the dear memory of Jonathan, which was, no doubt, stirred

to deeper tenderness by the sight of his helpless son; but he swiftly

passes to practical arrangements, full of common-sense and grasp of the

case. The restoration of Saul's landed estate implies that it was in

David's power. It had probably been forfeited to the crown,' as we in

England say, or perhaps had been squatted on' by people who had no

right to it. David, at any rate, will see that it reverts to its owner.

But what is a lame man to do with it? and will it be wise to let a

representative of the former dynasty loose in the territory of

Benjamin, where Saul's memory was still cherished? Apparently, David's

disposition of affairs was prompted partly by consideration for

Mephibosheth, partly by affection for Jonathan, and partly by policy.

So Ziba, who had not been present, is sent for, and installed as

overseer of the estate, to work it for his new master's benefit, while

the owner is to remain at Jerusalem in David's establishment. It was

prudent to keep Mephibosheth at hand. The best way to weaken a

pretender's claims was to make a pensioner of him, and the best way to

hinder his doing mischief was to keep him in sight.

But we need not suppose that this was David's only motive. He gratified

his heart by retaining the poor young man beside himself, and, no

doubt, sought to win his confidence and love. The recipient of his

kindness receives it in characteristic Eastern fashion, with

exaggerated words of self-depreciation, which sound almost too humble

to be quite sincere. A little gratitude is better than whining

professions of un worthiness.

And how did Ziba like his task? The singular remark that he had fifteen

sons and twenty servants' perhaps suggests that he was a person of some

importance; and the subsequent one that all in his house were servants

to Mephibosheth' may imply that neither they nor he quite liked their

being handed over thus cavalierly.

But, however that may be, we may note that common-sense and practical

sagacity should guide our mercifulness. Kindly impulses are good, but

they need cool heads to direct them, or they do more harm than good. It

is useless to set lame men to work an estate, even if they get a gift

of it. And it is wise not to put untried ones in positions where they

may plot against their benefactor. Mercifulness does not mean rash

trust in its objects. They will often have to be watched very closely

to keep them from going wrong. How many most charitable impulses have

been so unwisely worked out that they have injured their objects and

disappointed their subjects! We may note, too, in David's kindliness,

that it was prompt to make sacrifice, if, as is probable, he had become

owner of the estate. The pattern of all mercy, who is God, has not

loved us with a love which cost Him nothing. Sacrifice is the

life-blood of service.

III. The subsequent history of Mephibosheth and Ziba is somewhat

enigmatical. Usually the former is supposed to have been slandered by

the latter, and to have been truly attached to David. But it is at

least questionable whether Ziba was such a villain, and Mephibosheth

such an injured innocent, as is supposed. This, at least, is plain,

that Ziba demonstrated attachment to David at the time when self-love

would have kept him silent. It took some courage to come with gifts to

a discrowned king (2 Sam. xvi. 1-4); and his allegation about his

master has at least this support, that the latter did not come with the

rest of David's court to share his fortunes, and that the dream that he

might fish to advantage in troubled waters is extremely likely to have

occurred to him. Nor does it appear clear that, if Ziba's motive was to

get hold of the estate, his adherence to David would have seemed, at

that moment, the best way of effecting it.

If we look at the sequel (xix. 24-30) Mephibosheth's excuse for not

joining David seems almost as lame as himself. He says that Ziba

deceived him,' and did not bring him the ass for riding on, and

therefore he could not come. Was there only one ass available in

Jerusalem? and, when all David's entourage were streaming out to Olivet

after him, could not he easily have got there too if he had wished? His

demonstration of mourning looks very like a blind, and his language to

David has a disagreeable ring of untruthfulness, in its extreme

professions of humility and loyalty. Me thinks the cripple doth protest

too much. David evidently did not feel sure about him, and stopped his

voluble utterances somewhat brusquely: Why speakest thou any more of

thy matters?' That is as much as to say, Hold your tongue.' And the

final disposition of the property, while it gives Mephibosheth the

benefit of the doubt, yet looks as if there was a considerable doubt in

the king's mind.

We may take up the same somewhat doubting position. If he requited

David's kindness thus unworthily, is it not the too common experience

that one way of making enemies is to load with benefits? But no cynical

wisdom of that sort should interfere with our showing mercy; and if we

are to take the kindness of God' for our pattern, we must let our

sunshine and rain fall, as His do, on the unthankful and the evil.'

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MORE THAN CONQUERORS THROUGH HIM'

And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the

entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and

Ish-tob, and Maacah, were by themselves in the field. 9. When Joab saw

that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he

chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against

the Syrians: 10. And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand

of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the

children of Ammon. 11. And he said, if the Syrians be too strong for

me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong

for thee, then I will come and help thee. 12. Be of good courage, and

let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and

the Lord do that which seemeth Him good. 13. And Joab drew nigh, and

the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and

they fled before him. 14. And when the children of Ammon saw that the

Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into

the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to

Jerusalem. 15. And when the Syrians saw that they were smitten before

Israel, they gathered themselves together. 16. And Hadarezer sent, and

brought out the Syrians that were beyond the river: and they came to

Helam: and Shobach the captain of the host of Hadarezer went before

them. 17. And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together,

and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set

themselves in array against David, and fought with him. 18. And the

Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred

chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach

the captain of their host, who died there. 19. And when all the kings

that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before

Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians

feared to help the children of Ammon any more.'--2 SAMUEL x. 8-19.

David's growing power would naturally be regarded by neighbouring

states as a menace. Success provokes envy, and in this selfish world

strength usually encroaches on weakness, and weakness dreads strength.

So it was quite according to the way of the world that David's friendly

embassy to the king of Ammon should be suspected of covering hostile

intentions. Those who have no kindness in their own hearts are slow to

believe in kindness in others. What does he want to get by it?' is the

question put by cynical shrewd men,' when they see a good man doing a

gracious, self-forgetting act.

But the Ammonite courtiers need not have rejected David's overtures so

insolently as by shaving half his ambassadors' beards and docking their

robes. The insult meant war to the knife. Probably it was deliberately

intended as a declaration of hostilities, as it was immediately

followed by the preparation of a formidable coalition against Israel.

Possibly, indeed, the coalition preceded and occasioned the rejection

of David's conciliatory message. But, in any case, the Ammonite king

summoned his Syrian allies from a number of small states of which we

barely know the names, the chief of which was Zobah.

That state had apparently started into prominence under its king

Hadar-ezer, as he is called in this chapter, which is obviously a

clerical error for Hadad-ezer, as in 2 Samuel viii. 3, etc. The name

Hadad occurs again in Ben-hadad, and belonged to a Syrian god; so that

the king of Zobah's name, meaning Hadad [is] help,' may be taken as the

banner flaunted in the face of the army of Israel, and as making the

war a struggle of the false against the true God.

The war with the same enemies narrated in 2 Samuel viii. 3-13 is now

generally supposed to be the same as that recorded in the latter part

of this passage. It certainly seems more probable that there has been

some dislocation of the text, than that so crushing a defeat as that

retold in chapter viii. should have been followed by a revival of the

same coalition within a short time. If, however, there was such a

revival, it may remind us of the conditions of all warfare for God and

goodness, either in our own lives or in the world. Sins and vicious

institutions, once defeated, have a terrible power of swift recovery.

The thorns cut down sprout fast again. Let no man say, I have

extirpated that sin from my nature,' for, if he does, it will surprise

him when he is lulled in false security. Hadad-ezer is not so easily

got rid of. He does not know when he is beaten.

David took the bull by the horns, and did not wait to be attacked. It

was good policy to carry the war into the enemies' country, as it

generally is. God's soldiers have to be aggressive, and there is no

better way of losing what they have won than by being contented with

it. We must advance if we are not to retrograde. From I Chronicles we

learn that the Ammonites had begun the campaign by besieging Medeba, a

trans-Jordanic Israelitish city. The answer of Joab was to lay siege to

Rabbath, the capital of Ammon, an almost impregnable fastness, perched

on a cliff, and surrounded on all sides but one by steep ravines.

Apparently his bold strategy led to the abandonment of the attack on

Medeba, and to the hurried march of its besiegers to relieve Rabbath.

Probably the Syrian allies had been before Medeba, and suddenly

appeared in Joab's rear. Their advance led the besieged to attempt a

sortie, so that Joab was between two fires. It was a difficult

position. Whichever foe he attacked, his retreat was cut off, and

another enemy was ready to hurl itself on his rear. There was no time

for manoeuvring, and nothing for it but to face both assailants. So,

without hesitation he made his dispositions. The new-comers, the

Syrians, were evidently the more formidable, and Joab picked the best

men to deal with them under his own command, while his brother Abishai

was to give account of the Ammonites, who were pouring out of Rabbath.

There is sometimes advantage in being Mr. Facing-both-ways.' We are

often surrounded by allied evils or sins; for all our vices are

kindred, and help each other, and all public or social iniquities are

in league against the army of righteousness. We have to be many-sided

in our attacks on what is wrong, as well as in our development of what

is right.

Danger woke the best in Joab, Fierce and truculent as he often was, he

had a hero's mettle in him, and in that dark hour he flamed like a

pillar of light. His ringing words to his brother as they parted, not

knowing if they would ever meet again, are like a clarion call. They

extract encouragement out of the separation of forces, which might have

depressed, and cheerily pledge the two divisions to mutual help. What

was to happen, Joab, if the Syrians were too strong for thee, and the

Ammonites for Abishai? That very possible contingency is not

contemplated in his words. Rash confidence is unwise, but God's

soldiers have a right to go into battle not anticipating utter defeat.

Such expectation is apt to fulfil itself, and, on the other hand, to

believe that we shall conquer goes a long way towards making us

conquerors.

Does not Joab's pledge of mutual help carry in it a lesson applicable

to all the divisions of God's great army? In the presence of the

coalition of evil, is not the separation of the friends of good,

madness? When bad men unite, should not good men hold together? The

defeat or victory of one is the defeat or victory of all. We serve

under the same banner, and, instead of shutting up our sympathies

within the narrow limits of our own regiment, and even having a certain

satisfaction at the difficulties into which another has got, we should

feel that, if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it,' and

should be ready to help all our fellow-soldiers who need help.

Self-preservation as well as comradeship, and, above all, loyalty to

Him for whom we fight, should lead to that; for, if Abishai is crushed,

Joab will be in sorer peril.

His other word is equally pregnant. Be of good courage' is an

exhortation always in season for Christ's soldiers, for, whatever are

their foes, He that is with them is more than they that are with' their

enemies. One man with Christ to back him may always be sure of victory.

Calculations of probabilities and of resources may often yield occasion

for despondency if we calculate only what appears to sense, but if we

bring Christ into the calculation we shall be of good cheer. The Lord

is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?'

We may note, too, the stimulating motive drawn from the thought of what

Israel's army fought for,--Our people, and the cities of our God.'

Patriotism and devotion coalesced, and, like two contiguous flames in

some duplex lamp, each made the other burn the brighter. So we may feel

that we have the highest good of our people,' our brethren, in view,

and that, in helping them and warring against evil, we are fighting for

what belongs to God.

High courage, the effort to do their very best, and not to spare blood

or life in the fight, blended nobly in Joab and his brother with

recognition of God's supreme determination of the event. Nothing can

stand before men who live and fight in such a temper as that. The early

conquests of Mohammedanism were secured by just such a blending of

courage and submission. These were vulgar and poor, compared with the

victories that would attend a Church which was animated by these

principles in the higher form in which Christianity presents them.

The account of the victory is remarkable. It is surely not by accident

that no word is said about fighting. Note that it was as Joab drew nigh

unto the battle' that the Syrians fled as if in sudden panic, and

infected the Ammonites with their terror. We hear nothing of men slain,

or of any actual crossing of swords. Contrast verse 18, which tells of

a real fight. It is, perhaps, not pressing omissions too far to suggest

that the narrative favours the supposition of a bloodless victory. The

dangers that often appal Christ's servants have a way of often

disappearing when they are marched boldly up to. Like ghosts, they

vanish when accosted.

So ended one campaign. But Hadad-ezer, the soul of the coalition, was

not crushed, and the latter part of the passage tells of his renewed

attempt. Partial defeat stirs up our foes to stronger struggles. The

league was extended to include Syrian states farther east, and a still

more formidable expedition was fitted out to attack this dangerous

upstart king of Israel, who was casting his shadow so far. Such is

always the case. We are never in more danger of fresh assailants than

when we have won some victory over evil in ourselves or around us.

David repeated his former tactics. Not waiting to be attacked, and to

have the soil of Israel profaned and wasted by enemies, he crossed

Jordan to meet the would-be invader, and, when he met him, struck hard,

and crushed him and his host, slew the commander, and dispersed the

thunder-cloud. The coalition broke down. Hadad-ezer's tributaries were

glad to shake off his yoke and transfer their allegiance to David.

Nothing succeeds like success.' The alliances between worldly men

banded against God's soldiers are held together by self-interest, and,

when that can be best secured by deserting a man when he is down, away

go all the allies, tumbling over each other in their haste to be the

first to desert and bring feigned submission to the conqueror. The

jackals leave the sick lion. The Syrians had had enough of helping

Ammon, and Rabbath might fall without their lifting a finger. So hollow

are the world's coalitions against God and His anointed!

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THOU ART THE MAN

And David said to Nathan, As the Lord liveth, the man that hath done

this thing shall surely die; because he did this thing, and because he

had no pity. And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.'--2 SAMUEL

xii. 5-7.

Nathan's apologue, so tenderly beautiful, takes the poet-king on the

most susceptible side of his character. All his history shows him as a

man of wonderfully sweet, chivalrous, generous, swiftly compassionate

nature. And so, when he hears the story of a mean, heartless

selfishness, all that is best in him kindles into a generous

indignation, and flames out into instinctive condemnation. The man that

did this thing shall die because he had no pity.'

And then, on to that hot fervour of righteous wrath, comes this dash of

cold water, And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man.' Like some keen

spear-point, sharpened almost to invisibility, this short sentence (two

words in the original) driven by a strong hand, goes right through the

armour to the very heart. What a collapse there would be in the king

when the pointed forefinger of the prophet emphasised and drove home

the application!

I. This dramatic scene before us may be taken as suggesting first that

we are all strangely blind to our own faults.

If a man's own sin is held up before him a little disguised, he says,

How ugly it is!' And if only for a moment he can be persuaded that it

is not his own conduct but some other sinner's that he is judging, the

instinctive condemnation comes. We have two sets of names for vices:

one set which rather mitigates and excuses them, and another set which

puts them in their real hideousness. We keep the palliative set for

home consumption, and liberally distribute the plain-spoken, ugly set

amongst the vices and faults of our friends. The same thing which I

call in myself prudence I call in you meanness. The same thing which

you call in yourselves generous living, you call in your friend filthy

sensualism. That which, to the doer of it, is only righteous

indignation, to the onlooker is passionate anger. That which, in the

practiser of it, is no more than a due regard for the interests of his

own family and himself in the future, is, to the envious lookers-on,

shabbiness and meanness in money matters. That which, to the liar, is

only prudent diplomatic reticence, to the listener is falsehood. That

which, in the man that judges his own conduct, is but a choleric word,'

is, in his friend, when he judges him, flat blasphemy.'

And so we go all round the circle, and condemn our own vices, when we

see them in other people. So the king who had never thought, when he

stole away Uriah's one ewe lamb, and did him to death by traitorous

commands, setting him in the front of the battle, that he was wanting

in compassion, blazes up at once, and righteously sentences the other

man' to death, because he had no pity.' He had never thought of himself

or of his crime as cruel, as mean, as selfish, as heartless. But when

he sees a partially disguised picture of it he knows it for the devil's

child that it is.

O wad some Power the giftie gie us

To see oursels as ithers see us!

It wad frae mony a blunder free us,'

and so it would, to see ourselves as we see others. We judge our

brother and ourselves by two different standards.

And that is only one phase of a more general principle, one case that

comes under a yet wider law, viz. that we are all blind, strangely

blind, to our own faults. Why that is so I do not need to spend time in

inquiring, except for a distinctly practical purpose. Let me just

remind you how a strong wish for a thing that seems desirable always

tends to confuse to a man the plain distinction between right and

wrong; and how passions once excited, or the animal lusts and desires

once kindled in a man, go straight to their object without the smallest

regard to whether that object is to be reached by the breach of all

laws, human and divine, or not. Excite any passion, and the passion is

but a blind propensity towards certain good, and takes no question or

consideration of whether right or wrong is involved at all.

And further, habit familiarises with evil and diminishes our sense of

it as evil. A man that has been for half a day in some ill-ventilated

room does not notice the poisonous atmosphere; if you go into it you

are half suffocated at first, and breathe more easily as you get used

to it. A man can live amidst the foulest poison of evil; and, as the

Styrian peasants get fat upon arsenic, his whole nature may seem to

thrive by the poison that it absorbs. They tell us that the breed of

fish that live in the lightless caverns in the bowels of some

mountains, by long disuse have had their eyes atrophied out of them,

and are blind because they have lived out of the light. And so men that

live in the love of evil lose the capacity of discerning the evil, and

he that walketh in darkness' becomes blind, blind to his sin, and blind

to all the realities of life.

Then is it not true, too, that many of us systematically and of set

purpose, continually avoid all questions as to the moral nature of our

conduct? How many a man and woman who reads these words never sits down

to think whether what they have been doing is right or wrong, because

they have deep down in their consciences an uneasy suspicion as to what

the answer would be. So, by reason of fostering passion, by reason of

listening to wishes, by reason of the habit of wrongdoing, by reason of

the systematic avoidance of all careful investigation of our character

and of our conduct, we lose the power of fairly deciding upon the

nature of our own acts.

Then self-love comes in, and still another thing tends to blind us. We

are all ready to acquiesce in the general indictment, and so to shirk

the particular application of it. That is what people do about all

great moral principles that ought to affect conduct,--they admit them

in words, as general truths applying to mankind, and then hide

themselves in the crowd, and think that they escape the incidence and

particular application of the truths. No one of us would, I suppose,

venture in plain words to stand up and say: I am an exception to your

general confessions of sin,' and most of us would be ready to unite in

the acknowledgment: We have all come short of the glory of God,' though

in our consciences there has never stirred the faintest movement of

self-condemnation even whilst our lips have been uttering the

confession. Do not shrink away in the crowd, my brother! Come out to

the front, and stand by yourself as God sees you, isolated. Look at

your own actions; never mind about other men's. Do not content

yourselves with saying,' We have sinned'; say, I have sinned against

Thee.' God and you are as if alone in the universe. Against Thee, Thee

only, have I sinned.' There are no crowds in God's eyes; He deals with

single souls. Every one of us,--thou, and thou, and thou,--must give

account of himself to God.

II. In the next place, let me ask you to think how this story suggests

that the true work of God's message is to tear down the veil and to

show the ugly thing.

Nathan said unto David, Thou art the man.' It needed a prophet to do

that, with divine authority. Nothing less would suffice to get through

the thick bosses of the buckler of self-conceit and ignorance which he

had to penetrate. As God's messenger, he gathered up, as I said, into

one sharp-pointed, keen-edged, steel-bright sentence, the very spirit

of the whole ancient Law, which seeks to individualise the sinner, and

to drive home to the conscience the consciousness of wrong-doing.

The remarks that I have been making, in the former part of this sermon,

imperfect as they must necessarily be, may at least serve one or two

purposes in reference to this part of my discourse.

It seems to me that if what I have been saying as to a man's blindness

to his own true moral character be at all correct, there flows from

that thought a strong presumption in favour of a divine revelation. We

need another than our own voice to lay down the law of conduct, and to

accuse and condemn the breaches of it. Conscience is not a wholly

reliable guide, and is neither an impartial nor an all-knowing judge.

Unconsciousness of evil is not innocence. It is not the purest of women

who wipes her mouth and says, I have done no harm.' My conscience says

to me, It is wrong to do wrong'; but when I say to my conscience, Yes,

and pray what is wrong?' a large variety of answers is possible. A man

may sophisticate his conscience, or bribe his conscience, or throttle

his conscience, or sear his conscience. And so the man who is worst,

who, therefore, ought to be most chastised by his conscience, has most

immunity from it, and where, if it is to be of use, it ought to be most

powerful, there it is weakest.

What then? Why this, then--a standard that varies is not a standard; we

are left with a leaden rule. My conscience, your conscience, is like

the standard measures which we at present possess, which by their very

names--foot, handbreadth, nail, and the like, tell us that they were

originally but the length of one man's limb. And so your measure of

right and wrong, and another man's measure, though they may

substantially correspond, yet differ according to your differences of

education, character, and a thousand other things. So that the

individual man's standard needs to be rectified. You have to send all

the weights and measures up to the Tower now and then, to get them

stamped and certified. And, as I believe, this fluctuation of our moral

judgments shows the need for a fixed pattern and firm unchangeable

standard, external to our mutable selves. A light on deck which pitches

with the pitching ship is no guide. It must flash from a white pillar

founded on a rock and immovable amid the restless waves. Our need of

such a standard raises a strong presumption that a good God will give

us what we need, if He can. Such a standard He has given, as I believe,

in the revelation of Himself which lies in this book, and culminates in

the life and character of Jesus Christ our Lord. There, and by that, we

can set our watches. There we can read the law of morality, and by our

deflections from it we can measure the amount of our guilt.

But beyond that, the remarks which I have already made in the former

part of my sermon may suggest to us, along with this utterance of the

prophet's, that one indispensable characteristic and certain criterion

of a true message and gospel from God is that it pierces the conscience

and kindles the sense of sin. My dear brethren, there is a great deal

of so-called Christian teaching, both from pulpits and books in this

day, which, to my mind, is altogether defective by reason of its

underestimate of the cardinal fact of sin, and its consequent failure

to represent the fundamental characteristic of the gospel as being

deliverance and redemption. I am quite sure that the root of

nine-tenths of all the heresies that have ever afflicted the Christian

Church, and of the weakness of so much popular Christianity, is none

other than this failure adequately to recognise the universality and

the gravity of the fact of transgression. If a word comes to you, calls

itself God's message, and does not start with man's sin, nor put in the

forefront of its utterances the way by which the dominion of that sin

in your own heart can be broken, and the penalties of that sin in your

present and future life can be swept away, it is condemned, ipso facto,

as not a gospel from God, or fit for man. O my brother! it sounds

harsh; but it is the truest kindness, when Nathan stands before the

king, and with his flashing eye and stern, calm voice says, Thou art

the man.' Was not that nobler, truer, tenderer, worthier of God, than

if he had smoothed David down with soft speeches that would not have

roused his conscience? Is it not the truest benevolence that keeps the

surgeon's hand steady whilst his heart is touched by the pain that he

inflicts, as he thrusts his gleaming instrument of tender cruelty into

the poisonous sore? And are not God's mercy and love manifest for us in

this, that He begins all His work on us with the grave, solemn

indictment of each soul by itself, Thou art the man'?

He showed me all the mercy,

For He taught me all the sin.'

III. Lastly, let me say that God accuses us and condemns us one by one

that He may save us one by one.

The meaning of Nathan's sharp sentence was speedily disclosed when the

broken-down king exclaimed, I have sinned against the Lord,' and when,

with laconic force as great as that which barbed the condemnation, the

prophet stanched the wound with the brief words, And the Lord hath made

to pass the iniquity of thy sin.' The intention of the accusation is

the extension of the mercy and forgiveness. God, as the Apostle puts

it, hath concluded all in unbelief, that He might have mercy upon all.'

And now, mark, for the carrying out of that divine purpose in regard to

us, and for our possession of the proffered mercy, the same

individualising and isolating process is needful as was needful for the

conviction of the sin. God desires to save the world, but God can only

save men one at a time. There must be an individual access to Him for

the reception of forgiveness, as there must be in regard to the

conviction of sin, just as if He and I were the only two beings in the

whole universe. There is no wholesale entrance into God's Church or

into God's kingdom. God's mercy is not given to crowds, except as

composed of individuals who have individually received it. There must

be the personal act of faith; there must be my solitary coming to Him.

As the old mystics used to define prayer, so I might define the whole

process by which men are saved from their sins, the flight of the

lonely soul to the lonely God.' My brother, it is not enough for you to

say, We have sinned'; say, I have sinned.' It is not enough that from a

gathered congregation there should go up the united litany, Lord, have

mercy upon us! Christ, have mercy upon us! Lord, have mercy upon us!'

You must make the prayer your own: Lord, have mercy upon me!' It is not

enough that you should believe, as I suppose most of you fancy that you

believe, that Christ has died for the sins of the whole world. That

belief will give you no share in His forgiveness. You must come to

closer grips with Him than that; and you must be able to say, Who loved

me, and gave Himself for me.' Let us have no running away into the

crowd. Come out, and stand by yourselves, and for yourselves stretch

out your own band, and take Christ for yourselves.

A man may die of starvation in a granary. You may be lost in the midst

of this abundance which Christ has provided for you. And the difference

between really possessing salvation and not possessing it, lies very

largely in the difference between saying us' and me.' Thou art the man'

in regard to the general accusation of sin; Thou art the man' in regard

to the solemn law which proclaims that the soul that sinneth it shall

die'; and, blessed be God, Thou art the man' in regard to the great

promise that says, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.'

Christ gives you a blank cheque in His word: Whoso cometh unto Me, I

will in no wise cast out.' Write thine own name in, and by thy personal

faith in the Lamb of God that died for thee, thy sins shall pass away;

and all the fulness of God shall be thy very own for ever. If thou be

wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself, and if thou scornest, thou alone

shall bear it.'

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DAVID AND NATHAN

And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan

said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.'--2 SAMUEL xii.

13.

We ought to be very thankful that Scripture never conceals the faults

of its noblest men. High among the highest of them stands the

poet-king. Whoever, for nearly three thousand years, has wished to

express the emotions of trust in God, longing after purity, aspiration,

and rapture of devotion, has found that his words have been before him.

And this man sins; black, inexcusable, aggravated transgression. You

know the shameful story; I need not tell it over again. The Bible gives

it us in all its naked ugliness, and there are precious lessons to be

got out of it; such, for instance, as that it is not innocence that

makes men good. This is the man after God's own heart!' people sneer.

Yes! Not because saints have a peculiar morality, and atone for

adultery and murder by making or singing psalms, but because, having

fallen into foul sin, he learned to abhor it, and with many tears, with

unconquerable resolution, with deepened trust in God, set his face once

more to press toward the mark. That is a lesson worth learning.

And, again, David was not a hypocrite because he thus fell. All sin is

inconsistent with devotion; but, thank God, we cannot say how much or

how dark the sin must be which is incompatible with devotion, nor how

much evil there may still lurk and linger in a heart of which the main

set and aspiration are towards purity and God.

And, again, the worst transgressions are not the passionate outbursts

contradictory of the main direction of a life which sometimes come; but

the habitual, though they be far smaller, evils which are honey-combing

the moral nature. White ants will pick a carcase clean sooner than a

lion. And many a man who calls himself a Christian, and thinks himself

one, is in far more danger, from little pieces of chronic meanness in

his daily life, or sharp practice in his business, than ever David was

in his blackest evil.

But the main lesson of all is that great and blessed one of the

possibility of any evil and sin like this black one, being annihilated

and caused to pass away through repentance and confession. It is to

that aspect of our text that I turn, and ask you to look with me at the

three things that come out of it: David's penitence; David's pardon

consequent upon his penitence; and David's punishment, notwithstanding

his penitence and pardon.

I. First, then, the penitence.

What a divine simplicity there is in the words of our text: David said

unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.' That is all. In the

original, two words are enough to revolutionise the man's whole life,

and to alter all his relations to the divine justice and the divine

Friend. I have sinned against the Lord.' Not an easy thing to say; and

as the story shows us, a thing that David took a long time to mount up

to.

Remember the narrative. A year has passed since his transgression. What

sort of a year has it been? One of the Psalms tells us, When I kept

silence my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long; for day

and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture was turned into the

drought of summer.' There were long months of sullen silence, in which

a clear apprehension and a torturing experience of divine

disapprobation, like a serpent's fang, struck poison into his veins.

His very physical frame seems to have suffered. His heart was as dry as

the parched grass upon the steppes. That was what he got by his sin. A

moment of turbid animal delight, and long days of agony; dumb suffering

in which the sense of evil had not yet broken him down into a rain of

sweet tears, but lay, like a burning consciousness, within his heart.

And then came the prophet with his parable, so tender, so ingenious, so

powerful. And the quick flash of generous indignation, which showed how

noble the man was after all, with which he responded to the picture,

unknowing that it was a picture of his own dastardly conduct, led on to

the solemn words in which Nathan tore away the veil; and with a

threefold lever, if I may so say, overthrew the toppling structure of

his impenitence.

First of all, and most chiefly, he seeks to win him to repentance by a

picture of God's great love and goodness. I have done this and that and

the other thing for thee. What hast thou done for Me?' Ah, that is the

true beginning. You cannot frighten men into penitence, you may

frighten them into remorse; and the remorse may or may not lead on to

repentance. But bring to bear upon a man's heart the thought of the

infinite and perfect love of God, and that is the solvent of all his

obstinate impenitence, and melts him to cry, I have sinned.' And along

with that element there is the other, the plain striking away of all

disguises from the ugly fact of the sin. The prophet gives it its

hideous name, and that is one element in the process which leads to

true repentance. For so strange and subtle are the veils which we cast

over our own evils, that it comes sometimes to us with a shock and a

start when some word, that we know to connote wickedness of the deepest

dye, is applied to them. David had very likely so sophisticated his

conscience that, though he had been writhing under the sense that he

was a wrongdoer, it came to him with a kind of ugly surprise when the

naked words adultery' and murder' were pressed up against his

consciousness.

And the third element that brought him to his senses, and to his knees,

was the threatening of punishment, which is salutary when it follows

these other two, the revelation of a divine love and the unveiling of

the essential nature of my own act; but which without these is but the

hangman's whip' to which only inferior natures will respond. And these

three, the appeal to God's love, the revelation of his own sin, the

solemn warning of its consequences--these three brought to bear upon

David's heart, broke him down into a passion of penitence in which he

has only the two words to say, I have sinned against the Lord.' That is

all. That is enough.

And what is it? It is the recognition--which is essential to all real

penitence--that I have not merely broken some impersonal law, or done

something that hurts my fellows, but that I have broken the relations

which I ought to sustain to a living, loving Person, who is God. We

commit crimes against society, we commit faults against one another, we

commit sins against God, and the very notion of sin involves, as its

correlative, the thought of the divine Lawgiver.

So, dear brethren, penitence goes deeper than a recognition of demerit

and unworthiness. It is more than an acknowledgment of imperfection and

breach of morality. It is something different altogether from the

acknowledgment that I have committed a fault against my fellow. David

had done Bathsheba and Uriah, and in them his whole kingdom, foul

wrong, but, as he says in Psalm li., Against Thee, Thee only, have I

sinned.' His account with these is of a less grave character, but

against Thee I sinned.'

And in like manner, this penitence contains in it the recognition of

transgression against a loving Friend and Father, which had been

brought home to his mind by all the words of the rebuking prophet, who

was a kind of incarnate conscience for him now. And it contains, still

further, confession to God against whom he had sinned. The first

impulse of a man when he dimly discerns how far he has departed from

God's law, is that which the old story represents was the first impulse

of the first sinners--to hide himself in the trees of the garden. The

second impulse is to go to Him against whom we have sinned, and who

only therefore can deal with the sin in the way of forgiveness, and to

pour it all out before Him. Once an Apostle, when he caught a partial

glimpse of his own demerit and transgression, said to the Master with a

natural impulse, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' But

Peter had a deeper sense of his own sin, and a happier knowledge of

what Christ could do for his sin, when his brother Apostle whispering

to him in the boat, It is the Lord,' the traitor Apostle cast himself

into the shallow water and floundered through it anyhow, to get as

close as he could to the Master's feet.

Do not go away from God because you feel that you have sinned against

Him. Where should you go but to your mother's bosom, and hide your face

there, if you have committed faults against her? Where should you go

but to God if against Him you have transgressed? Look, my brother, at

your own character and conduct; measure the deficiencies and

imperfections, the transgressions and faults; ay! perhaps with some of

you, the crimes against men and society and human laws; but see beneath

all these a deeper thought; and stifle not the words that would come to

your lips as a relief, like a surgeon's lancet struck into some foul

gathering, I have sinned against the Lord.'

II. And now, secondly, notice with me David's pardon consequent upon

his repentance.

Can there be anything more striking--I do not say dramatic, for the

circumstances are far too serious for terms of art--can there be

anything more in the nature of a gospel to us all than that brief

dialogue? David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.' And

Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin.'

Immediate forgiveness, that is the first lesson that I would press upon

you. Dear brethren, it is an experience which you may each repeat in

your own history at this moment. It needs but the confession in order

that the forgiveness should come. At this end of the telephone whisper

your confession, and before it has well passed your lips there comes

back the voice sweet as that of angels, The Lord hath forgiven thy

sin.' One word, one motion of a heart aware of, and hating, and

desiring to escape from, its evil, brings with a rush the whole fulness

of fatherly and forgiving love into any heart. And that one confession

may be the turning-point of a man's life, and may obliterate all the

sinful past, and may bring him into loving, reconciled, harmonious

relations with the Almighty Judge.

Learn, too, not only the immediacy of the answer and the simplicity of

the means, but learn how thorough and complete God's dealing with your

sin may be. The original language of my text might be rendered, The

Lord hath caused thy sin to pass away'; the thought being substantially

that of some impediment or veil between man and Him which, with a touch

of His hand, He dissolves as it were into vapour, and so leaves all the

sky clear for His warmth and sunshine to pour down upon the heart. We

do not need to enter upon theological language in talking about this

great gift of forgiveness. It means substantially that howsoever you

and I have piled up mountain upon mountain, Alp upon Alp, of our evils

and transgressions, all pass away and become non-existent. Another word

of the Old Testament expresses the same idea when it speaks about sin

being covered.' Another word expresses the same idea when it speaks

about God as casting' men's sins into the depths of the sea'--all

meaning this one thing, that they no longer stand as barriers between

the free flow of His love and our poor hearts. He takes away the sense

of guilt, touches the wounded conscience, and there is healing in His

hand. As, according to the old belief, the sovereign, by laying his

hand upon sufferers from the King's evil' healed them and cleansed

them, so the touch of His forgiving love takes away the sense of guilt

and heals the spirit. He removes all the impediments between His love

and us. His love can now come undisturbed. His deepest and solemnest

judgments do not need to come; and no more does there stand frowning

between us and Him the spectre of our past.

People tell us that forgiveness is impossible, that whatsoever a man

soweth, that must he also reap'; that law is law, and that the

consequences cannot be averted. That is all quite true if there is not

a God. It is not true if there is; and if there is no God, there is no

sin. So if there is a God, there is forgiveness.

Consequences, as I shall have to show you in a moment, may still

remain, but pardon may be ours all the same. When you forgive your

child, does it mean that you do not thrash it, or does it mean that you

take it to your heart? And when God pardons, does it mean that He

waives His laws, or does it mean that He lets us come into the whole

warmth and sunshine of His love? Will you go there?

Forgiveness was to Jews a thing difficult to apprehend. It was hard for

them to understand the harmony of it with the rigid retribution on

which their whole system of religion reposed. But you and I have come

further into the light than Nathan and David had. And I have to preach

a modification of the words of my text which is not a limitation of

them, but the unveiling of their basis and the surest confirmation of

them, when I say In Him'--Jesus Christ--we have redemption through His

blood, even the forgiveness of sins.'

The New Testament teaches us that the Cross of Christ threw its power

back upon former transgressions as well as forward upon future ones;

and that in Him past ages, though they knew Him not, received

remission. Christ is the Medium of the divine forgiveness; Christ's

Cross is the ground of the divine pardon; Christ's sacrifice is the

guarantee for us that the sin which He has borne He has borne away. By

His stripes we are healed.' Wherefore, men and brethren, be it known

unto you, that through this Man is preached unto us the forgiveness of

our sins.'

III. Third and lastly, look at the punishment which follows--shall I

say notwithstanding or because of?--the penitence and the pardon.

In David's life there came the immediate retribution in kind, which was

signalised as such by the divine message--the death of the child who

was conceived in sin and shapen in iniquity.' But beyond that, look at

David's life after his great fall. There was no more brightness in it.

His own sin and example of lust loosed the bonds of morality in his

household, and his son followed his example and improved upon it. And

from that came Absalom's murder of his brother, and from that Absalom's

exile, and from that Absalom's rebellion, and from that Absalom's

death, which nearly killed his poor old father. And for all the rest of

his days his home was troubled, and his last years ended with the

turmoil of a disputed succession before his eyes were closed, all

traceable to this one foul crime.

Joab was the torment of David's later days, and Joab's power over him

depended upon his having been the instrument of Uriah's murder; and so

the master of the king, whose bidding he had done. Ahithophel was the

brain of Absalom's conspiracy. His defection struck a sharp arrow into

David's heart--mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted.' He

evidently hated the king with fierce hatred. He was Bathsheba's

grandfather; and we are not going wrong, I think, in tracing his

passionate hatred, and the peculiar form of insult which he counselled

Absalom to adopt, to the sense of foul wrong which had been done to his

house by David's crime.

And so all through his days this poor old king had to do what you and I

have to do--to bear the temporal results of sin. Be not deceived, God

is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.'

So of our pleasant vices the gods make whips to scourge us.' And it is

in mercy that we have to drink as we have brewed, that we have to lie

upon the beds that we have made; that in regard to outward

consequences, and in regard to our own hearts and inward history, we

are the architects of our own fortunes, and cannot escape the penalties

of our sins and of our faults. Better to have it so than be cursed with

impunity!

Some of you young men are sowing diseases in your bones that will

either make you invalids or will kill you before your time. All of us

are bearing about with us, in some measure and sense, the issues, which

are the punishments, of our evil. Let us thank Him and take up the

praise of the old psalm, Thou wast a God that forgivest them, though

Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions.' There is either merciful

chastisement here, that we may be parted from our sins, or there is

judgment hereafter.

O my brother! let me beseech you, do not commit the suicide of

impenitence, but go to Christ, in whom all our sins are taken away, and

lay your hands on the head of that great Sacrifice, and the Lord shall

cause to pass the iniquity of your sin.'

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GOD'S BANISHED ONES

God doth devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him.'--2

SAMUEL xiv. 14.

David's good-for-nothing son Absalom had brought about the murder of

one of his brothers, and had fled the country. His father weakly loved

the brilliant blackguard, and would fain have had him back, but was

restrained by a sense of kingly duty. Joab, the astute

Commander-in-chief, a devoted friend of David, saw how the land lay,

and formed a plan to give the king an excuse for doing what he wished

to do. So he got hold of a person who is called a wise woman' from the

country, dressed her as a mourner, and sent her with an ingeniously

made-up story of how she was a widow with two sons, one of whom had

killed the other, and of how the relatives insisted on their right of

avenging blood, and demanded the surrender of the murderer; by which,

as she pathetically said, the coal' that was left her would be

quenched.' The king's sympathy was quickly roused--as was natural in so

impulsive and poetic a nature--and he pledged his word, and finally his

oath, that the offender should be safe.

So the woman has him in a trap, having induced him to waive justice and

to absolve the guilty by an arbitrary act. Then she turns upon him with

an application to his own case, and bids him free himself from the

guilt of double measures and inconsistency by doing with his banished

son the same thing--viz. abrogating law and bringing back the offender.

In our text she urges still higher considerations--viz. those of God's

way of treating criminals against His law, of whom she says that He

spares their lives, and devises means-or, as the words might perhaps be

rendered, plans plannings'--by which He may bring them back. She would

imply that human power and sovereignty are then noblest and likest

God's when they remit penalties and restore wanderers.

I do not further follow the story, which ends, as we all know, with

Absalom's ill-omened return. But the wise woman's saying goes very

deep, and, in its picturesque form, may help to bring out more vividly

some truths--all-important ones--of which I wish to beg your very

earnest consideration and acceptance.

I. Note, then, who are God's banished ones.

The woman's words are one of the few glimpses which we have of the

condition of religious thought amongst the masses of Israel. Clearly

she had laid to heart the teaching which declared the great, solemn,

universal fact of sin and consequent separation from God. For the

banished ones' of whom she speaks are no particular class of glaring

criminals, but she includes within the designation the whole human

race, or, at all events, the whole Israel to which she and David

belonged. There may have been in her words--though that is very

doubtful--a reference to the old story of Cain after the murder of his

brother. For that narrative symbolises the consequences of all

evil-doing and evil-loving, in that he was cast out from the presence

of God, and went away into a land of wandering,' there to hide from the

face of the Father. On the one hand, it was banishment; on the other

hand, it was flight. So had Absalom's departure been, and so is ours.

Strip away the metaphor, dear brethren, and it just comes to this

thought, which I seek to lay upon the hearts of all my hearers now--you

cannot be blessedly and peacefully near God, unless you are far away

from sin. If you take two polished plates of metal, and lay them

together, they will adhere. If you put half a dozen tiny grains of sand

or dust between them, they will fall apart. So our sins have come

between us and our God. They have not separated God from us, blessed be

His name! for His love, and His care, and His desire to bless, His

thought, and His knowledge, and His tenderness, all come to every soul

of man. But they have rent us apart from Him, in so far as they make us

unwilling to be near Him, incapable of receiving the truest nearness

and blessedness of His presence, and sometimes desirous to hustle Him

out of our thoughts, and, if we could, out of our world, rather than to

expatiate in the calm sunlight of His presence.

That banishment is self-inflicted. God spurns away no man, but men

spurn Him, and flee from Him. Many of us know what it is to pass whole

days, and weeks, and years, as practical Atheists. God is not in all

our thoughts.

And more than that, the miserable disgrace and solitude of a soul that

is godless in the world is what many of us like. The Prodigal Son

scraped all his goods together, and thought himself freed from a very

unwelcome bondage, and a fine independent youth, when he went away into

the far country.' It was not quite so pleasant when provisions and

clothing fell short, and the swine's trough was the only table that was

spread before him. But yet there are many of us, I fear, who are

perfectly comfortable away from God, in so far as we can get away from

Him, and who never are aware of the degradation that lies in a soul's

having lowered itself to this, that it had rather not have God

inconveniently near.

Away down in the luxurious islands of the Southern Sea you will find

degraded Englishmen who have chosen rather to cast in their lot with

savages than to have to strain and work and grow. These poor

beach-combers of the Pacific, not happy in their degradation, but

wallowing in it, are no exaggerated pictures of the condition, in

reality, of thousands of us who dwell far from God, and far therefore

from righteousness and peace.

II. Notice God's yearning over His banished ones.

The woman in our story hints at, or suggests, a parallel which, though

inadequate, is deeply true. David was Absalom's father and Absalom's

king; and the two relationships fought against each other in his heart.

The king had to think of law and justice; the father cried out for his

son. The young man's offence had neither altered his relationship nor

affected the father's heart.

All that is true, far more deeply, blessedly true, in regard to our

relation, the wandering exiles' relation, to God. For, whilst I believe

that the highest form of sonship is only realised in the hearts of men

who have been made partakers of a new life through Jesus Christ, I

believe, just as firmly and earnestly, that every man and woman on the

face of the earth, by virtue of physical life derived from God, by

virtue of a spiritual being, which, in a very real and deep sense,

still bears the image of God, and by reason of His continued love and

care over them, is a child of His. The banished son is still a son, and

is His banished one.' If there is love--wonderful as the thought is,

and heart-melting as it ought to be--there must be loss when the child

goes away. Human love would not have the same name as God's unless

there were some analogy between the two. And though we walk in dark

places, and had better acknowledge that the less we speak upon such

profound subjects the less likely we are to err, yet it seems to me

that the whole preciousness of the revelation of God in Scripture is

imperilled unless we frankly recognise this--that His love is like

ours, delights in being returned like ours, and is like ours in that it

rejoices in presence and knows a sense of loss in absence. If you think

that that is too bold a thing to say, remember who it was that taught

us that the father fell on the neck of the returning prodigal, and

kissed him; and that the rapture of his joy was the token and measure

of the reality of his regret, and that it was the father to whom the

prodigal son was lost.' Deep as is the mystery, let nothing, dear

brethren, rob us of the plain fact that God's love moves all around the

worst, the unworthiest, the most rebellious in the far-off land, and

desires not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his

iniquity and live.'

And it is you, you, whom He wants back; you whom He would fain rescue

from your aversion to good and your carelessness of Him. It is you whom

He seeks, according to the great saying of the Master, the Father

seeketh' for worshippers in spirit and in truth.

III. Note the formidable obstacles to the restoration of the banished.

The words banished' and expelled' in our text are in the original the

same; and the force of the whole would be better expressed if the same

English word was employed as the equivalent of both. We should then see

more clearly than the variation of rendering in our text enables us to

see, that the being expelled' is no further stage which God devises

means to prevent, but that what is meant is that He provides methods by

which the banished should not be banished--that is, should be restored

to Himself.

Now, note that the language of this wise woman,' unconsciously to

herself, confesses that the parallel that she was trying to draw did

not go on all fours; for what she was asking the king to do was simply,

by an arbitrary act, to sweep aside law and to remit penalty. She

instinctively feels that that is not what can be done by God, and so

she says that He devises means' by which He can restore His banished.

That is to say, forgiveness and the obliteration of the consequences of

a man's sin, and his restoration to the blessed nearness to God, which

is life, are by no means such easy and simple matters as people

sometimes suppose them to be. The whole drift of popular thinking

to-day goes in the direction of a very superficial and easy gospel,

which merely says, Oh, of course, of course God forgives! Is not God

Love? Is not God our Father? What more do you want than that?' Ah! you

want a great deal more than that, my friends. Let me press upon you two

or three plain considerations. There are formidable obstacles in the

way of divine forgiveness.

If there are to be any pardon and restoration at all, they must be such

as will leave untouched the sovereign majesty of God's law, and,

untampered with, the eternal gulf between good and evil. That easygoing

gospel which says, God will pardon, of course!' sounds very charitable

and very catholic, but at bottom it is very cruel. For it shakes the

very foundations on which the government of God must repose. God's law

is the manifestation of God's character; and that is no flexible thing

which can be bent about at the bidding of a weak good-nature. I believe

that men are right in holding that certainly God must pardon, but I

believe that they are fatally wrong in not recognising this--that the

only kind of forgiveness which is possible for Him to bestow is one in

which there shall be no tampering with the tremendous sanctions of His

awful law; and no tendency to teach that it matters little whether a

man is good or bad. The pardon, which many of us seem to think is quite

sufficient, is a pardon that is nothing more noble than good-natured

winking at transgression. And oh! if this be all that men have to lean

on, they are leaning on a broken reed. The motto on the blue cover of

the Edinburgh Review, for over a hundred years now, is true: The judge

is condemned when the guilty is acquitted.' David struck a fatal blow

at the prestige of his own rule, when he weakly let his son off from

penalty. And, if it were possible to imagine such a thing, God Himself

would strike as fatal a blow at the justice and judgment which are the

foundations of His throne, if His forgiveness was such as to be capable

of being confounded with love which was too weakly indulgent to be

righteous.

Further, if there are to be forgiveness and restoration at all, they

must be such as will turn away the heart of the pardoned man from his

evil. The very story before us shows that it is not every kind of

pardon which makes a man better. The scapegrace Absalom came back

unsoftened, without one touch of gratitude to his father in his base

heart, without the least gleam of a better nature dawning upon him, and

went flaunting about the court until his viciousness culminated in his

unnatural rebellion. That is to say, there is a forgiveness which

nourishes the seeds of the crimes that it pardons. We have only to look

into our own hearts, and we have only to look at the sort of people

round us, to be very sure that, unless the forgiveness that is granted

us from the heavens has in it an element which will avert our wills and

desires from evil, the pardon will be very soon needed again, for the

evil will very soon be done again.

If there are to be forgiveness and restoration at all, they must come

in such a fashion as that there shall be no doubt whatsoever of their

reality and power. The vague kind of trust in a doubtful mercy, about

which I have been speaking, may do all very well for people that have

never probed the depths of their own hearts. Superficial notions of our

sin, which so many of us have, are contented with superficial remedies

for it. But let a man get a glimpse of his own real self, and I think

that he will wish for something a great deal more solid to grip hold

of, than nebulous talk of the kind that I have been describing. If once

we feel ourselves to be struggling in the black flood of that awful

river, we shall want a firmer hold upon the bank than is given to us by

some rootless tree or other. We must clutch something that will stand a

pull, if we are to be drawn from the muddy waters.

People say to us, Oh, God will forgive, of course!' Does this world

look like a place where forgiveness is such an easy thing? Is there

anything more certain than that consequences are inevitable when deeds

have been done, and that whatsoever a man sows that shall he also reap'

and whatsoever he brews that shall he also drink? And is it into a

grim, stern world of retribution like this that people will come, with

their smiling, sunny gospel of a matter-of-course forgiveness, upon

very easy terms of a slight penitence?

Brethren, God has to devise means,' which is a strong way of saying, in

analogy to the limitations of humanity, that He cannot, by an arbitrary

act of His will, pardon a sinful man. His eternal nature forbids it.

His established law forbids it. The fabric of His universe forbids it.

The good of men forbids it. The problem is insoluble by human thought.

The love of God is like some great river that pours its waters down its

channel, and is stayed by a black dam across its course, along which it

feels for any cranny through which it may pour itself. We could never

save ourselves, but

He that might the vengeance best have took,

Found out the remedy.'

IV. And so the last word that I have to say is to note the triumphant,

divine solution of these difficulties.

The work of Jesus Christ, and the work of Jesus Christ alone, meets all

the requirements. It vindicates the majesty of law, it deepens the gulf

between righteousness and sin. Where is there such a demonstration of

the awful truth that the wages of sin is death' as on that Cross on

which the Son of God died for us and for all His banished ones'? Where

is there such a demonstration of the fixedness of the divine law as in

that death to which the Son of God submitted Himself for us all? Where

do we learn the hideousness of sin, the endless antagonism between God

and it, and the fatal consequences of it, as we learn them in the

sacrifice of our Lord and Saviour? Where do we find the misery and

desolation of banishment from God so tragically uttered as in that cry

which rent the darkness of eclipse,' My God! My God! why hast Thou

forsaken Me?'

That work of Christ's is the only way by which it is made absolutely

certain that sins forgiven shall be sins abhorred; and that a man once

restored shall cleave to his Restorer as to his Life. That work is the

only way by which a man can be absolutely certain that there is

forgiveness, in spite of all the accusations of his own conscience; in

spite of all the inexorable working out of penalties in the system of

the world which seems to contradict the fond belief; in spite of all

that a foreboding gaze tells, or ought to tell, of a judgment that is

to follow.

Brethren, God has devised a means. None else could have done so. I

beseech you, realise these facts that I have been trying to bring

before you, and the considerations that I have based upon them, so far

as they commend themselves to your hearts and consciences; and do not

be content with acquiescing in them, but act upon them. We are all

exiles from God, unless we have been brought nigh by the blood of

Christ.' In Him, and in Him alone, can God restore His banished ones.

In Him, and in Him alone, can we find a pardon which cleanses the

heart, and ensures the removal of the sin which it forgives. In Him,

and in Him alone, can we find, not a peradventure, not a subjective

certainty, but an external fact which proclaims that verily there is

forgiveness for us all. I pray you, dear friends, do not be content

with that half-truth, which is ever the most dangerous lie, of divine

pardon apart from Jesus Christ. Lay your sins upon His head, and your

hand in the hand of the Elder Brother, who has come to the far-off land

to seek us, and He will lead you back to the Father's house and the

Father's heart, and you will be no more strangers and foreigners, but

fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God.'

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PARDONED SIN PUNISHED

And It came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and

horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2. And Absalom rose up early,

and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man

that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom

called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy

servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. 3. And Absalom said unto

him. See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed

of the king to hear thee. 4. Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made

judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might

come unto me, and I would do him justice! 5. And it was so, that when

any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand,

and took him, and kissed him. 6. And on this manner did Absalom to all

Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts

of the men of Israel. 7. And it came to pass after forty years, that

Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow,

which I have vowed unto the Lord, in Hebron. 8. For thy servant vowed a

vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the Lord shall bring

me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the Lord. 9. And the

king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. 10.

But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As

soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom

reigneth in Hebron. 11. And with Absalom went two hundred men out of

Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and

they knew not any thing. 12. And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the

Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he

offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people

increased continually with Absalom.'--2 SAMUEL xv. 1-12.

There was little brightness in David's life after his great sin. Nathan

had told him, even while announcing his forgiveness, that the sword

should never depart from his house; and this revolt of Absalom's may be

directly traced to his father's disgraceful crime. The solemn lesson

that pardoned sin works out its consequences, so that whatsoever a man

soweth, that shall he also reap,' is taught by it. The portion of the

story with which we are concerned has two stages,--the slow hatching of

the plot, and its final outburst.

I. Verses 1 to 6 give us the preparation of the mine. It takes four

years, during which Absalom plays all the tricks usual to aspirants for

the most sweet voices of the multitude. He seems to have been but a

poor creature; but it does not take much brain to do a great deal of

mischief. He was vain, headstrong, with a dash of craft and a large

amount of ambition. He had no love for his father, and no ballast of

high principle, to say nothing of religion. He was a spoiled child

grown to be a man, with a child's petulance and unreason, but a man's

passions. He loved his unfortunate sister, but it was as much wounded

honour as love which led him to the murder of his elder brother Amnon.

That crime cleared his way to the throne; and David's half-and-half

treatment of him after it, neither sternly punishing nor freely

pardoning, set the son against the father, and left a sense of injury.

So he became a rebel.

The story tells very vividly how he adopted the familiar tactics of

pretenders. How old, and yet how modern, it reads! We who live in a

country where everybody is an elector' of some sort, and candidates are

plentiful, see the same things going on, in a little different dress,

before our eyes. Absalom begins operations by dazzling people with

ostentatious splendour. In better days Samuel had trudged on foot,

driving a heifer before him, to anoint his father; and royalty had

retained a noble simplicity in the hands of Saul and David. But plain

living and high thinking' did not suit Absalom; and he had gauged the

popular taste accurately enough in setting up his chariot with its

fifty runners. That was a show something like a king, and, no doubt,

much more approved than David's simplicity. But it was an evil omen to

any one who looked below the surface. When luxury grows, devotion

languishes. The senseless ostentation which creeps into the families of

good men, and is sustained by their weak compliance with their spoiled

children's wishes, does a world of harm. We in Lancashire have a

proverb, Clogs, carriage, clogs,' which puts into three words the

history of three generations, and is verified over and over again.

How well Absalom has learned the arts of the office-seeker! Along with

his handsome equipage he shows admirable devotion to the interests of

his constituents.' He is early at the gate, so great is his appetite

for work; he is accessible to everybody; he flatters each with the

assurance that his case is clear; he gently drops hints of sad

negligence in high quarters, which he could so soon set right, if only

he were in power; and he will not have the respectful salutation of

inferiors, but grasps every hard hand, and kisses each tanned cheek,

with an affectation of equality very soothing to the dupes.

Electioneering' is much the same all the world over; and Absalom has a

good many imitators nearer home.

There was, no doubt, truth in the charge he made against David of

negligence in his judicial and other duties. Ever since his great sin,

the king seems to have been stunned into inaction. The heavy sense of

demerit had taken the buoyancy out of him, and, though forgiven, he

could never regain the elastic energy of purer days. The psalms which

possibly belong to this period show a singular passivity. If we suppose

that he was much in the seclusion of his palace, a heavily-burdened and

spirit-broken man, we can understand how his condition tempted his

heartless, dashing son to grasp at the reins which seemed to be

dropping from his slack hands, and how his passivity gave opportunity

for Absalom's carrying on his schemes undisturbed, and a colour of

reasonableness to his charges. For four years this went on unchecked,

and apparently unsuspected by the king, who must have been much

withdrawn from public life not to have taken alarm. Nothing takes the

spring out of a man like the humiliating sense of sin. The whole tone

of David's conduct throughout the revolt is, I deserve it all. Let them

smite, for God hath bidden them.' To this resourceless, unresisting

submission to his enemies, sin had brought the daring soldier. It is

not old age that has broken his courage and spirit, but the

consciousness of his foul guilt, which weighs on him all the more

heavily because he knows that it is pardoned.

II. The second part of our subject tells of the explosion of the

long-prepared mine. It was necessary to hoist the flag of revolt

elsewhere than in Jerusalem, and some skill is shown in choosing

Hebron, which had been the capital before the capture of the Jebusite

city, and in which there would be natural jealousy of the new

metropolis. The pretext of the sacrifice at Hebron, in pursuance of a

vow made by Absalom in his exile, was meant to touch David's heart in

two ways,--by appealing to his devotional feelings, and by presenting a

pathetic picture of his suffering and devout son vowing in the land

where his father's wrath had driven him. It is not the first time that

religion has been made the stalking-horse for criminal ambition, nor is

it the last. Politicians are but too apt to use it as a cloak for their

personal ends. Absalom talking about his vow is a spectacle that might

have made the most unsuspecting sure that there was something in the

wind. Such a use of religious observances shows more than anything else

could do, the utter irreligion of the man who can make it. A son

rebelling against his father is an ugly sight, but rebellion disguised

as religion adds to the ugliness. David suspects nothing; or, if he

does, is too broken to resist, and, perhaps glad at any sign of grace

in his son, or pleased to gratify any of his wishes, sends him away

with a benediction. What a parting,--the last, though neither knew it!

The plot had spread widely in four years, and messengers had been sent

through all Israel to summon its adherents to Hebron. If David had been

as popular as in his early days, it would have been impossible for such

a widely spread conspiracy to have come so near a head without some

faithful soul having been found to tell him of it. But obviously there

was much smouldering discontent, arising, no doubt, from such causes as

the pressure of taxation, the gloom that hung over the king, the

partial paralysis of justice, the transference of the capital, the

weight of wars, and, at lowest, the craving for something new. Few

reigns or lives set in unclouded brightness. The western horizon is

often filled with a bank of blackness. Strangely enough, Absalom

invited two hundred men to accompany him, who were ignorant of the

plot. That looks as if its strength was outside Jerusalem, as was

natural. These innocents were sufficiently associated with Absalom to

be asked to accompany him, and, no doubt, he expected to secure their

complicity when he got them away. Unsuspecting people are the best

tools of knaves. It is better not to be on friendly terms with Absalom,

if we would be true to David. The last piece of preparation recorded is

the summoning of Abithophel to come and be the brain of the plot. He

had been David's wisest counsellor, and is probably the familiar

friend, in whom I trusted,' whose defection the Psalmist mourns so

bitterly, and whose treachery was a marvellous foreshadowing of the

traitor who dipped in the dish with David's Lord. Note that he had

already withdrawn from Jerusalem to his own city, from which he came at

once to Hebron. Absalom could flatter and play the well-worn tricks of

a pretender, but a subtler, cooler head was wanted now, and the

treacherous son was backed up by the traitor friend. And the conspiracy

was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.' What a

tragical issue to the joyous loyalty of early days! What a strange

madness must have laid hold on the nation to have led them to prefer

such a piece of petulance and vanity to their hero-poet-king! What did

it mean?

The answer is not far to seek, and it is the great lesson of this

story. David's sin was truly repented and freely forgiven, but not left

unpunished. God is too loving to shield men from the natural

consequences, in the physical and social world, of their sins. The

penitent drunkard's hand shakes, and his constitution is not renewed,

though his spirit is. Only, punishment is changed into discipline, when

the heart rests in the assurance of pardon, and is accepted as a token

of a Father's love. In every way God made of the vice the whip to

scourge the sinner, and David, like us all, had to drink as he had

brewed, though he was forgiven the sin.

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A LOYAL VOW

And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are

ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.'--2 SAMUEL xv.

15.

We stand here at the darkest hour of King David's life. Bowed down by

the consciousness of his past sin, and recognising in the rebellion of

his favourite son the divine chastisement, his early courage and

buoyant daring seem to have ebbed from him wholly. He is forsaken by

the mass of his subjects, he is preparing to abandon Jerusalem, and to

flee as an exile, as he says himself so pathetically, whither I may.'

And at that moment of deepest depression there comes one little gleam

of consolation and one piece of chivalrous devotion which brightens the

whole story. His special retainers, apparently a bodyguard mostly of

foreigners, rally round him. Mostly foreigners, I say, for these hard

words Cherethites and Pelethites' most probably mean inhabitants of the

island of Crete, and Philistines. And as to six hundred of them, at all

events, there can be no doubt, for they are expressly said to be men of

Gath who followed after him.' At all events, there was a little nucleus

of men, not his own subjects, who determined to share his fate,

whatever it was. And the words of my text are their words, Behold, thy

servants are ready to do whatsoever the king shall appoint.' Or, as the

word stands in the original, in an abrupt, half-finished sentence, even

more pathetic, According to all that my lord the king shall appoint,

behold thy servants.' These men were foreigners, not bound to render

obedience to the king, but giving it because their hearts were touched.

They were loyal amongst rebels, so many Abdiels, among the faithless,

faithful only' these, and they avowed their determination to cleave to

the sovereign of their choice at a time when his back was at the wall,

and their determination to follow him meant only peril and privation.

They were filled with a passionate personal attachment to the king, and

that personal attachment was ready to manifest itself as a willing

sacrifice, as such love always is ready.

Now surely in all this there is a lesson for us. The heroism of men

towards a man, the uncalculating devotion and magnificent

self-sacrifice of which the poorest human soul is capable when touched

to fine issues by some heart-love, are surely not all meant to be

lavished on fellow-creatures, who, alas! generally receive the most of

them. But these rude Philistines and Gittites, Goliath's

fellow-townsmen, may preach to us Christians a lesson. Why should not

we say as they said, According to all that my Lord the King shall

appoint, behold Thy servants'?

I. So then, first, our King's will ought to be our will.

The obedience that is promised in these words is not the obedience of

action only, but it is the bowing down of the heart. And for us

Christian men there is neither peace nor nobleness in our lives, except

in the measure in which the will of Jesus Christ and our wills are

accurately conterminous and identical. Wheresoever the two coincide,

there is strength for us; wheresoever they diverge, there are weakness

and certain ruin. These two wills ought to be like two of Euclid's

triangles, or other geometric figures, the one laid upon the other, and

each line and curve and angle accurately corresponding and coinciding,

so that the two cover precisely the same ground.

Christ's will my will; that is religion. And you and I are Christians

just in the measure in which that coincidence of wills is true about

us, and not one hair's-breadth further, for all our professions.

Wheresoever my will diverges from Christ, in that particular I am not

His man; and Christian' simply means Christ's man.' I belong to Him

when I think as He does, love as He does, will as He does, accept His

commandment as the law of my life, His pattern as my example, His

providence as sufficient and as good. Where we thus yield ourselves to

Him, there we are strong, and so far, and only so far, have we a right

to say that we are the King's servants at all.

This absolute submission we do render to one another when our hearts

are touched; and the fact that men can and do give it--husbands to

wives, wives to husbands, children to parents, friends to one another--

the fact that there is the capacity for that giving of one's self away,

lodged deep in our nature, tells us what we are meant to do with it.

Whose image and superscription hath it?' Was it meant that we should

thus live in slavish submission even to the dearest loved ones? Surely

not; for that is the destruction of individuality. No, but it was meant

that we should lay our wills down at Christ's feet and say, Not my

will, but Thine,' and Thine mine because I have made it mine by love.

Then there is rest, and then we have solved the secret of the world,

and are what our Lord would have us to be. Oh! do not our relations to

our dear ones, with all that infinite power of self-sacrifice that our

love brings with it, rebuke the partial extent of our surrender to our

Master? and may we not be ashamed when we contrast the joy that we feel

in giving up to those that we love, and the reluctance with which, too

often, we obey the Master's commandments, and the long years of

repining and murmuring before we submit,' as we call it, which too

often means accept His providences as inevitable, though not as

welcome? To be ready to do whatsoever my Lord the King shall choose,'

believing that His choice is wisdom and kindness for us, and His

commandments a blessing and a gift, is the attitude and temper for us

all. Is there any other attitude to Jesus Christ which corresponds to

our relation to Him, to what He has done for us, to what we say that He

is to us? He has the right to us, because He has given us Himself. He

asks nothing from us but that of which He has already set us the

example. He gave Himself for us, as the Apostle says with emphasis that

is often unnoticed. He gave Himself for us' that He might purchase us

for Himself.' He who would possess another must impart Himself, and

love, that yields a whole man to the loved one, only springs when the

loved one mutually yields her whole heart. The King does not command

from above, but He comes down amongst us, and He says, I gave Myself

for thee; what givest thou to Me?' O brethren, let us answer with that

brave, chivalrous old Gittite:--As the Lord liveth, and as my Lord the

King liveth, surely in what place my Lord the King shall be, whether in

death or life, even there also will Thy servant be.'

II. Then notice again, still sticking to our story, that this yielding

up of will, if it is worth anything, will become the more intense and

fervent when surrounded by rebels.

All Israel, with that poor feather-headed, vain Absalom, were on the

one side, and David and these foreigners were on the other. Years of

quiet uneventful life would never have brought out such magnificent

heroism of devotion and self-surrender, as was crowded into that one

moment of loyalty asserted in the face of triumphant rebels and

traitors.

In like manner, the more Christ's reign is set at nought by the people

about us, and the less they recognise the blessedness and the duty of

submission to Him, the more strong and unmistakable should be the

utterance of our loyalty. We should grasp His hand tighter by reason of

the storms that may rage round about us. And if we dwell amongst those

who, in any measure, deny or neglect His merciful dominion, let us see

to it that we all the more hoist our colours at our doors, and stand by

them when they are hoisted, that nobody may mistake under which King we

serve.

You in your places of business, you young men in your warehouses, and

all of us in our several spheres, have to come across many people who

have no share in our loyalty and offer no allegiance to our King. That

is the reason for intenser loyalty on our part. Never you mind what

others say or do; do not take your orders from them. Better be with the

handful that rally round David than with the crowds that run after

Absalom! Better be amongst the few that are faithful than amongst the

multitudes that depart! Dare to be singular, if it comes to that; and

at all events remember that your relationship to your Master is a thing

that concerns Him and you chiefly, and that you are not to take the

pattern of your loyalty, nor the orders for your lives, from any lips

but His own.

Hush all other voices that would command, and hush them that you may

listen to Him. It is always difficult enough for Christian men to

ascertain, in perplexed circumstances, the clear path of duty; but it

is impossible if, along with His voice, we let the buzz of the crowd be

audible in our ears. There is only one way by which we can hear what

our Lord the King appoints,' and that is by making a great stillness in

our souls, and neither letting our own yelping inclinations give

tongue, nor the babble of men round us, and their notions of life and

of what is right, have influence upon us, but waiting to hear what God

the Lord, speaking in Christ the King, has to say to us. And, remember,

the more rebels there are, the more need for us to be conspicuously

loyal to our King.

III. Again, this complete yielding of ourselves in practical obedience

and heart submission to command merits and providences is to be

maintained, whatsoever it may lead to in the way of privation and

difficulty.

It was no holiday vow, made upon some parade day, that these brave

foreigners were bringing to their king now, but it meant we are ready

to suffer, starve, fight, lose everything, die if need be, to be true

to thee.' And the very thought of the impending danger elevated the

men's consciousness, and made heroes out of very common people. And

perhaps that is the best effect of our difficulties and sorrows, that

they strike fire sometimes (if they are rightly accepted and used) out

of what seems to be only dead, lumpish matter, and many a Christian

shoots up into a stature of greatness and nobleness in his sorrow, who

was but a very commonplace creature when all things went well with him.

That is the kind of obedience that Christ delights to accept, obedience

that is ready for anything, and does not wait to make sure that there

is no danger of forfeiting a whole skin and a quiet life, before it

vows itself to service. Are we only to be fair-weather Christians,' or

are we to be prepared for all the trials and sufferings that may befall

us? A Christianity that does not bring any worldly penalties along with

it is not worth much. Christians of Christ's pattern have generally to

give up something for their Christianity. They give up nothing that it

is not gain to lose, nothing that they are not better without, but they

have to surrender much in which other people find great enjoyment, and

which their weaker selves would delight in too. Are you ready, my

brother, for that? Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving

against sin.' The old days of heroism and martyrdom are done with, as

far as we are concerned, whatever may lie in the future. But do we make

willingly and gladly the surrenders and the self-abnegations that are

demanded by our loyalty to our Master? Have we ever learned to say

about any line of action that our poor, lower nature grasps at, and our

higher, enlightened by communion with Jesus Christ, forbids: So did not

I because of the fear of the Lord'? We can talk about following

Christ's footsteps; do you think that if we had stood where these rude

soldiers stood, or had anything as dark in prospect, as the price of

our faithfulness to our King, as they had as the price of faithfulness

to theirs, there would have rung from our lips the utterly sincere vow

that sprang joyously from theirs: Behold Thy servants, ready to do

whatever our Lord the King shall appoint'?

IV. A final thought, which travels beyond my text, is that such

thorough-going obedience, irrespective of consequences, is the secret

of all blessedness.

Great peace have they which love Thy law': the peace of conscience; the

peace of ceasing from that which is our worst enemy, self-will; the

peace of self-surrender; the peace of feeling 'Tis His to command; tis

mine to obey'; the peace of casting the whole settling of the campaign

on the King's shoulders, and of finding our duty restricted to tramping

along with cheery heart on the path that He has appointed. That is

worth having. Oh! if we could cease from self and lay our wills down

before Him, then we should be quiet. The tranquil heart is the heart

which has the law of Christ within it, and the true delight of life

belongs to those who truly say, I delight to do Thy will.' So yielding,

so obeying, so submitting, so surrendering one's self, life becomes

quiet, and strong, and sweet. And, if I might so turn the story that we

have been considering, the faithful soldiers who have been true to the

King when His throne was contested, will march with laurelled heads in

His triumphant train when He comes back after His final and complete

victory, and reign with Him in the true City of Peace, where His will

shall be perfectly done by loving hearts, and all His servants shall be

kings.

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ITTAI OF GATH

And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the Lord liveth, and as my

lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be,

whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.'--2

SAMUEL xv. 21.

It was the darkest hour in David's life. No more pathetic page is found

in the Old Testament than that which tells the story of his flight

before Absalom. He is crushed by the consciousness that his punishment

is deserved--the bitter fruit of the sin that filled all his later life

with darkness. His courage and his buoyancy have left him. He has no

spirit to make a stand or strike a blow. If Shimei runs along the

hillside abreast of him, shrieking curses as he goes, all he says is:

Let him curse; for the Lord hath bidden him.'

So, heartbroken and spiritless, he leaves Jerusalem. And as soon as he

has got clear of the city he calls a halt, in order that he may muster

his followers and see on whom he may depend. Foremost among the little

band come six hundred men from Gath--Philistines--from Goliath's city.

These men, singularly enough, the king had chosen as his bodyguard;

perhaps he was not altogether sure of the loyalty of his own subjects,

and possibly felt safer with foreign mercenaries, who could have no

secret leanings to the deposed house of Saul. Be that as it may, the

narrative tells us that these men had come after him from Gath.' He had

been there twice in the old days, in his flight from Saul, and the

second visit had extended over something more than a year. Probably

during that period his personal attraction, and his reputation as a

brilliant leader, had led these rough soldiers to attach themselves to

his service, and to be ready to forsake home and kindred in order to

fight beside him.

At all events here they are, faithful among the faithless,' as foreign

soldiers surrounding a king often are--notably, for instance, the Swiss

guard in the French Revolution. Their strong arms might have been of

great use to David, but his generosity cannot think of involving them

in his fall, and so he says to them: I am not going to fight; I have no

plan. I am going where I can. You go back and "worship the rising sun."

Absalom will take you and be glad of your help. And as for me, I thank

you for your past loyalty. Mercy and peace be with you!'

It is a beautiful nature that in the depth of sorrow shrinks from

dragging other people down with itself. Generosity breeds generosity,

and this Philistine captain breaks out into a burst of passionate

devotion, garnished, in soldier fashion, with an unnecessary oath or

two, but ringing very sincere and meaning a great deal. As for himself

and his men, they have chosen their side. Whoever goes, they stay.

Whatever befalls, they stick by David; and if the worst come to the

worst they can all die together, and their corpses lie in firm ranks

round about their dead king. David's heart is touched and warmed by

their outspoken loyalty; he yields and accepts their service. Ittai and

his noble six hundred tramp on, out of our sight, and all their

households behind them. Now what is there in all that, to make a sermon

out of?

I. First, look at the picture of that Philistine soldier, as teaching

us what grand passionate self-sacrifice may be evolved out of the

roughest natures.

Analyse his words, and do you not hear, ringing in them, three things,

which are the seed of all nobility and splendour in human character?

First, a passionate personal attachment; then, that love issuing, as

such love always does, in willing sacrifice that recks not for a moment

of personal consequences; that is ready to accept anything for itself

if it can serve the object of its devotion, and will count life well

expended if it is flung away in such a service. And we see, lastly, in

these words a supreme restful delight in the presence of him whom the

heart loves. For Ittai and his men, the one thing needful was to be

beside him in whose eye they had lived, from whose presence they had

caught inspiration; their trusted leader, before whom their souls bowed

down. So then this vehement speech is the pure language of love.

Now these three things,--a passionate personal attachment, issuing in

spontaneous heroism of self-abandonment, and in supreme satisfaction in

the beloved presence,--may spring up in the rudest, roughest nature. A

Philistine soldier was not a very likely man in whom to find refined

and lofty emotion. He was hard by nature, hardened by his rough trade;

and unconscious that he was doing anything at all heroic or great.

Something had smitten this rock, and out of it there came the pure

refreshing stream. And so I say to you, the weakest and the lowest, the

roughest and the hardest, the most selfishly absorbed man and woman

among us, has lying in him and her dormant capacities for flaming up

into such a splendour of devotion and magnificence of heroic

self-sacrifice as is represented in these words of my text. A mother

will do it for her child, and never think that she has done anything

extraordinary; husbands will do such things for wives; wives for

husbands; friends and lovers for one another. All who know the

sweetness and power of the bond of affection know that there is nothing

more gladsome than to fling oneself away for the sake of those whom we

love. And the capacity for such love and sacrifice lies in all of us.

Prosaic, commonplace people as we are, with no great field on which to

work out our heroisms; yet we have it in us to love and give ourselves

away thus, if once the heart be stirred.

And lastly, this capacity which lies dormant in all of us, if once it

is roused to action, will make a man blessed and dignified as nothing

else will. The joy of unselfish love is the purest joy that man can

taste; the joy of perfect self-sacrifice is the highest joy that

humanity can possess, and they lie open for us all.

And wherever, in some humble measure, these emotions of which I have

been speaking are realised, there you see weakness springing up into

strength, and the ignoble into loftiness. Astronomers tell us that

sometimes a star that has shone inconspicuous, and stood low down in

their catalogues as of fifth or sixth magnitude, will all at once flame

out, having kindled and caught fire somehow, and will blaze in the

heavens, outshining Jupiter and Venus. And so some poor, vulgar, narrow

nature, touched by this Promethean fire of pure love that leads to

perfect sacrifice, will flame in the forehead of the morning sky' an

undying splendour, and a light for evermore.

Brethren, my appeal to you is a very plain and simple one, founded on

these facts:--You all have that capacity in you, and you all are

responsible for the use of it. What have you done with it? Is there any

person or thing in this world that has ever been able to lift you up

out of your miserable selves? Is there any magnet that has proved

strong enough to raise you from the low levels along which your life

creeps? Have you ever known the thrill of resolving to become the

bondservant and the slave of some great cause not your own? Or are you,

as so many of you are, like spiders living in the midst of your web,

mainly intent upon what you can catch by it? You have these capacities

slumbering in you. Have you ever set a light to that inert mass of

enthusiasm that lies within you? Have you ever woke up the sleeper?

Look at this rough soldier of my text, and learn from him the lesson

that there is nothing that so ennobles and dignifies a commonplace

nature as enthusiasm for a great cause, or self-sacrificing love for a

worthy heart.

II. The second remark which I make is this:--These possibilities of

love and sacrifice point plainly to God in Christ as their true object.

Whose image and superscription hath it?' said Christ, looking at the

Roman denarius that they brought and laid on His palm. If the Emperor's

head is on it, why, then, he has a right to it as tribute. And then He

went on to say, Render, therefore, unto Caesar the things which are

Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' So there are things

that have God's image and superscription stamped on them, and such are

our hearts, our whole constitution and nature. As plainly as the penny

had the head of Tiberius on it, and therefore proclaimed that he was

Emperor where it was current, so plainly does every soul carry in the

image of God the witness that He is its owner and that it should be

rendered in tribute to Him.

And amongst all these marks of a divine possession and a divine

destination printed upon human nature, it seems to me that none is

plainer than this fact, that we can all of us thus give ourselves away

in the abandonment of a profound and all-surrendering love. That

capacity unmistakably proclaims that it is destined to be directed

towards God and to find its rest in Him. As distinctly as some silver

cup, with its owner's initials and arms engraved upon it, declares

itself to be meet for the master's use,' so distinctly does your soul,

by reason of this capacity, proclaim that it is meant to be turned to

Him in whom alone all love can find its perfect satisfaction; for whom

alone it is supremely blessed and great to lose life itself; and who

only has authority over human spirits.

We are made with hearts that need to rest upon an absolute love; we are

made with understandings that need to grasp a pure, a perfect, and, as

I believe, paradoxical though it may sound, a personal Truth. We are

made with wills that crave for an absolute authoritative command, and

we are made with a moral nature that needs a perfect holiness. And we

need all that love, truth, authority, purity, to be gathered into one,

for our misery is that, when we set out to look for treasures, we have

to go into many lands and to many merchants, to buy many goodly pearls.

But we need One of great price, in which all our wealth may be

invested. We need that One to be an undying and perpetual possession.

There is One to whom our love can ever cleave, and fear none of the

sorrows or imperfections that make earthward-turned love a rose with

many a thorn, One for whom it is pure gain to lose ourselves, One who

is plainly the only worthy recipient of the whole love and

self-surrender of the heart.

That One is God, revealed and brought near to us in Jesus Christ. In

that great Saviour we have a love at once divine and human, we have the

great transcendent instance of love leading to sacrifice. On that love

and sacrifice for us Christ builds His claim on us for our hearts, and

our all. Life alone can communicate life; it is only light that can

diffuse light. It is only love that can kindle love; it is only

sacrifice that can inspire sacrifice. And so He comes to us, and asks

that we should just love Him back again as He has loved us. He first

gives Himself utterly for and to us, and then asks us to give ourselves

wholly to Him. He first yields up His own life, and then He says: He

that loseth his life for My sake shall find it.' The object, the true

object, for all this depth of love which lies slumbering in our hearts,

is God in Christ, the Christ that died for us.

III. And now, lastly, observe that the terrible misdirection of these

capacities is the sin and the misery of the world.

I will not say that such emotions, even when expended on creatures, are

ever wasted. For however unworthy may be the objects on which they are

lavished, the man himself is the better and the higher for having

cherished them. The mother, when she forgets self in her child, though

her love and self-forgetfulness and self-sacrifice may, in some

respects, be called but an animal instinct, is elevated and ennobled by

the exercise of them. The patriot and the thinker, the philanthropist,

ay! even--although I take him to be the lowest in the scale--the

soldier who, in some cause which he thinks to be a good one, and not

merely in the tigerish madness of the battlefield, throws away his

life--are lifted in the scale of being by their self-abnegation.

And so I am not going to say that when men love each other passionately

and deeply, and sacrifice themselves for one another, or for some cause

or purpose affecting only temporal matters, the precious elixir of love

is wasted. God forbid! But I do say that all these objects, sweet and

gracious as some of them are, ennobling and elevating as some of them

are, if they are taken apart from God, are insufficient to fill your

hearts: and that if they are slipped in between you and God, as they

often are, then they bring sin and sorrow.

There is nothing more tragic in this world than the misdirection of

man's capacity for love and sacrifice. It is like the old story in the

Book of Daniel, which tells how the heathen monarch made a great feast,

and when the wine began to inflame the guests, sent for the sacred

vessels taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, that had been used for

Jehovah's worship; and (as the narrative says, with a kind of shudder

at the profanation), They brought the golden vessels that were taken

out of the temple of the House of God, which was at Jerusalem, and the

king and his princes, his wives and his concubines, drank in them. They

drank wine and praised the gods.' So this heart of mine, which, as I

said, has the Master's initials and His arms engraven upon it, in token

that it is His cup, I too often fill with the poisonous and

intoxicating draught of earthly pleasure and earthly affections; and as

I drink it, the madness goes through my veins, and I praise gods of my

own making instead of Him whom alone I ought to love.

Ah, brethren! we should be our own rebukers in this matter, and the

heroism of the world should put to shame the cowardice and the

selfishness of the Church. Contrast the depth of your affection for

your household with the tepidity of your love for your Saviour.

Contrast the willingness with which you sacrifice yourself for some

dear one with the grudgingness with which you yield yourselves to Him.

Contrast the rest and the sense of satisfaction in the presence of

those whom you love, and your desolation when they are absent, with the

indifference whether you have Christ beside you or not. And remember

that the measure of your power of loving is the measure of your

obligation to love your Lord; and that if you are all frost to Him and

all fervour to them, then in a very solemn sense a man's foes shall be

they of his own household.' He that loveth father or mother more than

Me is not worthy of Me.'

And so let me gather all that I have been saying into the one earnest

beseeching of you that you would bring that power of uncalculating love

and self-sacrificing affection which is in you, and would fasten it

where it ought to fix--on Christ who died on the cross for you. Such a

love will bring blessedness to you. Such a love will ennoble and

dignify your whole nature, and make you a far greater and fairer man or

woman than you ever otherwise could be. Like some little bit of black

carbon put into an electric current, my poor nature will flame into

beauty and radiance when that spark touches it. So love Him and be at

peace; give yourselves to Him and He will give you back yourselves,

ennobled and transfigured by the surrender. Lay yourselves on His

altar, and that altar will sanctify both the giver and the gift. If you

can take this rough Philistine soldier's words in their spirit, and in

a higher sense say, Whether I live I live unto the Lord, or whether I

die I die unto the Lord; living or dying, I am the Lord's,' He will let

you enlist in His army; and give you for your marching orders this

command and this hope, If any man serve Me let him follow Me; and where

I am there shall also My servant be.'

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THE WAIL OF A BROKEN HEART

Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a

pillar, which is in the king's dale; for he said, I have no son to keep

my name in remembrance; and he called the pillar after his own name:

and it is called unto this day, Absalom's Place. 19. Then said Ahimaaz

the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that

the Lord hath avenged him of his enemies. 20. And Joab said unto him.

Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings

another day; but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the

king's son is dead. 21. Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what

thou hast seen. And Cushi bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. 22 Then

said Ahimaaz the ton of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me,

I pray thee, also run after Cushi. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou

run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? 23. But howsoever,

said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the

way of the plain, and overran Cushi. 24. And David sat between the two

gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the

wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running

alone. 25. And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king

said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace,

and drew near. 26. And the watchman saw another man running: and the

watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running

alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. 27. And the

watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the

running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good

man, and cometh with good tidings. 28. And Ahimaaz called, and said

unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face

before the king, and said, Blessed be the Lord thy God, which hath

delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the

king. 29. And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz

answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw

a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. 30. And the king said unto

him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.

31. And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord the king:

for the Lord hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up

against thee. 32. And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man

Absalom safe I And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and

all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.

33. And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the

gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom! My son,

my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my

son!'--2 SAMUEL xviii. 18-33.

The first verse of this passage and the one preceding it give a

striking contrast between the actual and the designed burial-place of

Absalom. The great pit among the sombre trees, where his bloody corpse

was hastily flung, with three darts through his heart, and the rude

cairn piled over it, were a very different grave from the ostentatious

tomb in the king's dale,' which he had built to keep his memory green.

This was what all his restless intrigues and unbridled passions and

dazzling hopes had come to. He wanted to be remembered, and he got his

wish; but what a remembrance! That gloomy pit preaches anew the vanity

of vaulting ambition which o'erleaps itself,' and tells us once more

that

Only the actions of the just

Smell sweet, and blossom in the dust.'

I. The first picture here shows a glimpse of the battlefield, and

brings before us three men, each in different ways exhibiting how small

a thing Absalom's death was to all but the heartbroken father, and each

going his own road, heedless of what lay below the heap of stones. The

world goes on all the same, though death is busy, and some

heart-strings be cracked. The minute details which fill the most part

of the story, lead up to, and throw into prominence, David's burst of

agony at the close. The three men, Ahimaaz, Joab, and the Cushite

(Ethiopian), are types of different kinds of self-engrossment, which is

little touched by others' sorrows. The first, Ahimaaz, the young priest

who had already done good service to David as a spy, is full of the

joyous excitement of victory, and eager to run with what he thinks such

good tidings. The word in verse 19, bear tidings,' always implies good

news; and the youthful warrior-priest cannot conceive that the death of

the head of the revolt can darken to the king the joy of victory, He is

truly loyal, but, in his youthful impetuosity and excitement, cannot

sympathise with the desolate father, who sits expectant at Mahanaim.

Right feeling and real affection often fail in sympathy, for want of

putting oneself in another's place; and, with the best intentions,

wound where they mean to cheer. A little imagination; guided by

affection, would have taught Ahimaaz that the messenger who told David

of Absalom's death would thrust a sharper spear into his heart than

Joab had driven into Absalom's.

Joab is a very different type of indifference. He is too much

accustomed to battle to be much flushed with victory, and has killed

too many men to care much about killing another. He is cool enough to

measure the full effect of the news on David; and though he clearly

discerns the sorrow, has not one grain of participation in it. He has

some liking for Ahimaaz, and so does not wish him to run, but dissuades

him on the ground (verse 22, Revised Version) that he will win no

reward. That is the true spirit of the mercenary, who cannot conceive

of a man taking trouble unless he gets paid for it somehow, and will

fight and kill, all in the way of business, without the least spark of

enthusiasm for a cause. Hard stolidity and brutal carelessness shielded

him from any womanish' tenderness. Absalom was dead, and he had killed

him. It was a good thing, for it had put out the fire of revolt. No

doubt David would be sorry, but that mattered little. Only it was

better for the message to go by some one whose fate was of no

consequence. So he picks out the Cushite,' probably an Ethiopian slave;

and if David in his anguish should harm him, nobody will be hurt but a

friendless stranger.

The Cushite gets his orders; and he too is, in another fashion,

careless of their contents and effect. Without a word, he bows himself

to Joab, and runs, as unconcerned as the paper of a letter that may

break a heart. Ahimaaz still pleads to go, and, gaining leave, takes

the road across the Jordan valley, which was probably easier, though

longer; while the other messenger went by the hills, which was a

shorter and rougher road.

II. The scene shifts to Mahanaim, where David had found refuge. He can

scarcely have failed to take an omen from the name, which commemorated

how another anxious heart had camped there, and been comforted, when it

saw the vision of the encamping angels above its own feeble, undefended

tents, and Jacob called the name of that place Mahanaim' (that is, Two

Camps'). How the change of scene in the narrative helps its vividness,

and makes us share in the strain of expectancy and the tension of

watching the approaching messengers! The king, restless for news, has

come out to the space between the outer and inner gates, and planted a

lookout on the gate-house roof. The sharp eyes see a solitary figure

making for the city, across the plain. David recognises that, since he

is alone, he must be a messenger; and now the question is, What has he

to tell? We see him coming nearer, and share the suspense. Then the

second man appears; and clearly something more had happened, to require

two. What was it? They run fast; but the moments are long till they

arrive. The watchman recognises Ahimaaz by his style of running; and

David wistfully tries to forecast his tidings from his character. It is

a pathetic effort, and reveals how anxiously his heart was beating.

As soon as Ahimaaz is within earshot, though panting with running, no

doubt, he shouts, with what breath is left, the one word, Peace!' and

then, at David's feet, tells the victory, Blessed be the Lord thy God';

the triumph was Jehovah's gift, and in it He had shown Himself David's

God, and vindicated His servant's trust. But Ahimaaz is more devout and

thankful than David. The king has neither praise and thankfulness to

God nor to man. He has no pleasure in the victory; no interest in the

details of the fight; no thankfulness for a restored kingdom; no word

of eulogium for his soldiers; nothing but devouring anxiety for his

unworthy son. How chilling to Ahimaaz, all flushed with eagerness, and

proud of victory, and panting with running, and hungry for some word of

praise, it must have been, to get for sole answer the question about

Absalom! He shrinks from telling the whole truth, which, indeed, the

Cushite was officially despatched to tell; but his enigmatic story of a

great tumult as he left the field, of which he did not know the

meaning, was meant to prepare for the bitter news. So he is bid to

stand aside, and no words more vouchsafed to him. A cool reception,

unworthy of David! As Ahimaaz stood there, neglected, he would think

that the politic Joab was right after all.

The Cushite must have been close behind him, for he comes up as soon as

the brief conversation is over. A deeper anxiety must have waited his

tidings; for he must have something more to tell than victory. His

first words add nothing to Ahimaaz's information. What, then, had he

come for? David forebodes evil, and, with the monotony of a man

absorbed in one anxiety, repeats verbatim his former question. Poor

king! He more than half knew the answer, before it was given. The

Cushite with some tenderness veils the fate of Absalom in the wish that

all the king's enemies may be as that young man is.' But the veil was

thin, and the attempt to console by reminding of the fact that the dead

man was an enemy as well as a son, was swept away like a straw before

the father's torrent of grief.

III. The sobs of a broken heart cannot be analysed; and this wail of

almost inarticulate agony, with its infinitely pathetic reiteration, is

too sacred for many words. Grief, even if passionate, is not forbidden

by religion; and David's sensitive poet-nature felt all emotions

keenly. We are meant to weep; else wherefore is there calamity? But

there were elements in David's mourning which were not good. It blinded

him to blessings and to duties. His son was dead; but his rebellion was

dead with him, and that should have been more present to his mind. His

soldiers had fought well, and his first task should have been to honour

and to thank them. He had no right to sink the king in the father, and

Joab's unfeeling remonstrance, which followed, was wise and true in

substance, though rough almost to brutality in tone. Sorrow which sees

none of the blue because of one cloud, however heavy and thunderous, is

sinful. Sorrow which sits with folded hands, like the sisters of

Lazarus, and lets duties drift, that it may indulge in the luxury of

unrestrained tears, is sinful. There is no tone of It is the Lord! let

Him do what seemeth Him good,' in this passionate plaint; and so there

is no soothing for the grief. The one consolation lies in submission.

Submissive tears wash the heart clean; rebellious ones blister it.

David's grief was the bitter fruit of his own sin. He had weakly

indulged Absalom, and had probably spared the rod, in the boy's youth,

as he certainly spared the sword when Absalom had murdered his brother.

His own immorality had loosened the bonds of family purity, and made

him ashamed to punish his children. He had let Absalom flaunt and

swagger and live in luxury, and put no curb on him; and here was the

end of his foolish softness. How many fathers and mothers are the

destroyers of their children to-day in the very same fashion! That

grave in the wood might teach parents how their fatal fondness may end.

Children, too, may learn from David's grief what an unworthy son can do

to stuff his father's pillow with thorns, and to break his heart at

last.

But there is another side to this grief. It witnesses to the depth and

self-sacrificing energy of a father's love. The dead son's faults are

all forgotten and obliterated by death's effacing fingers.' The

headstrong, thankless rebel is, in David's mind, a child again, and the

happy old days of his innocence and love are all that remain in memory.

The prodigal is still a son. The father's love is immortal, and cannot

be turned away by any faults. The father is willing to die for the

disobedient child. Such purity and depth of affection lives in human

hearts. So self-forgetting and incapable of being provoked is an

earthly father's love. May we not see in this disclosure of David's

paternal love, stripping it of its faults and excesses, some dim shadow

of the greater love of God for His prodigals,--a love which cannot be

dammed back or turned away by any sin, and which has found a way to

fulfil David's impossible wish, in that it has given Jesus Christ to

die for His rebellious children, and so made them sharers of His own

kingdom?

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BARZILLAI

And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I

should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? 35. I am this day fourscore

years old: and can I discern between good and evil! can thy servant

taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of

singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet

a burden unto my lord the king? 36. Thy servant will go a little way

over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me

with such a reward? 37. Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again,

that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my

father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go

over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto

thee.'--2 SAMUEL xix. 34-37.

To the Young.

People often fancy that religion is only good to die by, and many

exhortations are addressed to the young, founded on the possibility

that an early death may be their lot. That, no doubt, is a very solemn

consideration, but it is by no means the sole ground on which such an

appeal may or should be rested. To some of you an early death is

destined. To the larger number of you will be granted a life protracted

to middle age, and to some of you silver hair will come, and you may

see your children's children. I wish to win you seriously to look

forward to the life on earth that is before you, and to the end to

which it is likely to come, if you be spared in the world long enough.

The little picture in these verses is a very beautiful one. David had

been fleeing from his rebellious Absalom, and his adversity had

winnowed his friends. He had crossed the Jordan to the hill-country

beyond, and there, while he was lurking with his crown in peril, and a

price on his head, and old friends dropping from him in their eagerness

to worship the rising sun, this Barzillai with others brought him

seasonable help (xvii. 23), When David returned victorious, Barzillai

met him again. David offered to take him to Jerusalem and to set him in

honour there, The old man answered in the words of our text.

Now I take them for the sake of the picture of old age which they give

us. Look at them: the intellectual powers are dimmed, all taste for the

pleasures and delights of sense is gone, ambition is dead, capacity for

change is departed. What is left? This old man lives in the past and in

the future; the early child-love of the father and mother who, eighty

years ago, rejoiced over his cradle, remains fresh; he cannot any more

hear the voice of the singing men and women,' but he can hear the

tones, clear over all these years, of the dear ones whom he first

learned to love. The furthest past is fresh and vivid, and his heart

and memory are true to it. Also he looks forward familiarly and calmly

to the very near end, and lives with the thought of death. He keeps

house with it now. It is nearer to him than the world of living men. In

memory is half of his being, and in hope is the other half. All his

hopes are now simplified and reduced to one, a hope to die and be

united again with the dear ones whom he had so long remembered. And so

he goes back to his city, and passes out of the record--an example of a

green and good old age.

Now, young people, is not that picture one to touch your hearts? You

think in your youthful flush of power and interest, that life will go

on for ever as it has begun, and it is all but impossible to get you to

look forward to what life must come to. I want you to learn from that

picture of a calm, bright old age, a lesson or two of what life will

certainly do to you, that I may found on these certainties the old, old

appeal, Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth'.

I. Life will gradually rob you of your interest in all earthly things.

Your time of life is full of ebullient feeling, and sees freshness,

glory, and beauty everywhere. Even the least enthusiastic men are

enthusiastic in their early days. You have physical strength, the

keenness of unpalled senses, the delights of new powers, the

blessedness of mere living. All this springs partly from physical

causes, partly from the novelty of your position. Thank God! all young

creatures are happy, and you among the rest.

Now, I do not ask you to restrain and mortify these things. But I do

ask you to remember the end. It is as certain that joys will pall, it

is as certain that subjects of interest will be exhausted, it is as

certain that powers will decay, as that they now are what they are. All

these grave, middle-aged, careful people round you were like you once.

You, if you live, will be like them. The spring tints are natural, but

they are transient; the blossoms are not always on the fruit-trees.

Think, then, of the End: to make you thankful; to stimulate you; but

also to lead you to take for your object what will never pall. All

created things go. Only the gospel provides you with a theme which

never becomes stale, with objects which are inexhaustible.

Here is a lesson for--

(a) Thinkers: Knowledge, it shall vanish away.'

(b) Sensualists: Man delights me not, nor woman either.' How old was he

who said that?

(c) Ambitious, self-advancing men.

Is it worth your while to devote yourself to transient aims?

Is it congruous with your dignity as immortal souls?

Is it innocent or guilty?

Is the gospel not a thing to live by as well as to die by?

II. Life will certainly rob you of the power to change.

Barzillai knew that David's court was no place for him; he had been

bred on the mountains of Gilead, and his habits suited only a simple

country life. The court might be better, but he could not fit into it.

But there was his boy Chimham; take him, he was young enough to bend

and mould.

Now this is true in a far loftier way. I need not dwell on the

universality of this law, how it applies to all manner of men, but I

use it now in reference only to the gospel and your relation to it. You

will never again be so likely to become a Christian, if you let these

early days pass.

You say, I will have my fling, sow my wild oats, will wait a little

longer, and then'--and then what? You will find that it is infinitely

harder to close with Christ than it would have been before.

While you delay, you are stiffening into the habit of rejection. Custom

is one of our mightiest friends or foes.

While you delay, you are doing violence to conscience, and so weakening

that to which the gospel appeals.

While you delay, you are becoming more familiar with the unreceived

message and so weakening the power of the gospel.

While you delay, you are adding to the long list of your sins.

While you delay, youth is slipping from you.

Make a mark with a straw on the clay and it abides; hammer on the brick

with iron and it only breaks. Youth is a brief season. It is the season

for forming habit, for receiving impression, for building up character.

The sluggard will not plough by reason of the cold, therefore shall he

beg in harvest and have nothing.' Your present time is seed time. God

forbid that I should say that it is impossible, but I do say that it is

hard, for a man to be born again when he is old.'

If you do become Christ's servant later in life, your whole condition

will be different from what it would have been if you had begun when

young to trust and love Him. Think of the difficulty of rooting out

habits and memories. Think of the horrid familiarity with evil. Think

of the painful contrition for wasted years, which must be theirs who

are hired at the eleventh hour, after standing all the day idle.

Contrast the experience of him who can say, I Thy servant fear God from

my youth,' who has been led by God's mercy from childhood in the narrow

way, who by early faith in Christ has been kept in the slippery ways of

youth.

Of the one we can but say, Is not this a brand plucked from the

burning?' The other is innocent of much transgression.'

I have small hope of changing middle-aged and old men. To you I turn,

you young men and women, you children, and to each of you I say, Wilt

thou not from this time say, My Father, Thou art the guide of my

youth?'

III. Life will certainly deepen your early impressions.

The old Barzillai dying looks back to his early days.

So I point the lesson: Keep thy heart with all diligence,' and let your

early thoughts be bright and pure ones.

Remember that you will never find any love like a father's and

mother's. Don't do what will load your memories in after days with

sharp reproaches.

IV. Life will bring you nearer and nearer to the grave.

Hope after hope dies out, and there is nothing left but the hope to

die. How beautiful the facing of it so as to become calmly familiar

with it, making it an object of hope, with bright visions of reunion!

How can such an old age so bright and beautiful be secured? Surely the

one answer is,--by faith in Jesus Christ.

Think of an old Christian resting, full of years, full of memories,

full of hopes, to whom the stir of the present is nothing, who has come

so near the place where the river falls into the great sea that the

sounds on the banks are unheard. It is calm above the cataract, and

though there be a shock when the stream plunges over the precipice, yet

a rainbow spans the fall, and the river peacefully mingles with the

shoreless, boundless ocean.

Dear young friends, what shall the end be'? It is for yourselves to

settle. Oh, take Christ for your Lord! Then, though so far as regards

the bodily life the youths shall faint and be weary,' as regards the

true self the life may be one of growing maturity, and at last you may

come to the grave as a shock of corn that is fully ripe.'

Trust, love, and serve Jesus, that thus calm, thus beautiful, may be

your days here below, that if you die young you may die ripe enough for

heaven, and that if God spares you to reverence and the silver hairs,'

you may crown a holy life by a peaceful departure, and, sitting in the

antechamber of death, may not grieve for the departure of youth and

strength and buoyancy and activity, knowing that they also serve who

only stand and wait,' and then may shake off the clog and hindrance of

old age when you pass into the presence of God, and there, as being the

latest-born of heaven, may more than renew your youth, and may enter on

a life which weariness and decay never afflict, but with which immortal

youth, with its prerogatives of endless hope, of keenest delight, of

unwearying novelty, of boundless joy, abides for evermore.

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DAVID'S HYMN OF VICTORY

For Thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that, rose up

against me hast Thou subdued under me. 41. Thou hast also given me the

necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. 42. They

looked, but there was none to save; even unto the Lord, but He answered

them not. 43. Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I

did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad.

44. Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, Thou

hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall

serve me. 45. Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as

they hear, they shall be obedient unto me. 46. Strangers shall fade

away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places. 47. The Lord

liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of

my salvation. 48. It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down

the people under me, 49. And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies:

Thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me:

Thou hast delivered me from the violent man. 50. Therefore I will give

thanks unto Thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and I will sing praises

unto Thy name. 51. He is the tower of salvation for His king; and

sheweth mercy to His anointed, unto David, and to his seed for

evermore.'--2 SAMUEL xxii. 40-51.

The Davidic authorship of this great hymn has been admitted even by

critics who are in general too slow to recognise it. One of these says

that there is no Israelite king to whom the expressions in the psalm

apply so closely as to David.' The favourite alternative theory that

the speaker is the personified nation is hard to accept. The voice of

individual trust and of personal experience sounds clear in the glowing

words. Two editions of the hymn are preserved for us,--in Psalm xviii.

and 2 Samuel. Slight variations exist in the two copies, which may

probably be merely accidental. Nothing important depends on them. The

text begins with the closing words of a description of God's arming the

singer for his victories, and goes on to paint the tumult of battle and

the rout of the foe (verses 40-43); then follows triumphant expectation

of future wider victories (verses 44-46); and that leads up to the

closing burst of grateful praise (verses 47-51).

I. We are not to forget that what is described in verses 40-43 is a

literal fight, with real swords against very real enemies. We may draw

lessons of encouragement from it for our conflict with spiritual

wickednesses, but we must not lose sight of the bloody combat with

flesh and blood which the singer had waged. He felt that God had braced

his armour on him, had given him the impenetrable shield' which he wore

on his arm, and had strengthened his arms to bend the bow of steel.' We

see him in swift pursuit, pressing hard on the flying foe, crushing

them with his fierce charge, trampling them under foot. I did beat them

small as the dust of the earth.' His blows fell like those of a great

pestle, pulverising some substance in a mortar. I did stamp them as the

mire of the streets,'--a vivid picture of trampling down the prostrate

wretches, for which Psalm xviii. gives the less picturesque variant,

did cast them out.' In their despair the fugitives shriek aloud for

God's help, and the Psalmist has a stern joy in knowing their cries to

be unheard.

Now, such delight in an enemy's despair and destruction, such

gratification at the vanity of his prayers, are far away from being

Christian sentiments, and the gulf is not wholly bridged by the

consideration that David felt himself to be God's Anointed, and enmity

to him to be, consequently, treason against God. His feelings were most

natural and entirely consistent with the stage of revelation in which

he lived. They were capable of being purified into that triumph in the

victory of good and the ruin of evil without which there is no vigorous

sympathy with Christ's conflict. They kindle, by their splendid energy

and condensed rapidity, an answering glow even in readers so far away

from the scene as we are. But still they do belong to a lower level of

feeling, and result from a less full revelation than belongs to

Christianity. The light of battle which blazes in them is not the fire

which Jesus longed to kindle on earth.

But we may well take a pattern from the stern soldier's recognition

that all his victory was due to God alone. The strength that he put

forth was God's gift. It was God who subdued the insurgents, not David.

The panic which made the foe take to flight was infused into them by

God. No name but Jehovah's was to be carved on the trophy reared on the

battlefield. The human victor was but the instrument of the divine

Conqueror. Such lowly reference of all our power and success to Him

will save us from overweening self-adulation, and is the surest way to

retain the power which He gives, and which is lost most surely when we

take the credit of it to ourselves.

II. The enemies thus far have been from among his own subjects, but in

verses 44-46 a transition is made to victory over strangers'; that is,

foreign nations. The triumph over the strivings of my people' heartens

the singer to expect that he will be' head of the nations.' The other

version of the hymn (Psalm xviii.) reads simply the people.'

The picture of hasty surrender as soon as they hear of me' is graphic.

His very name conquers. The strangers shall submit themselves unto me'

is literally shall lie,' or yield feigned obedience. They fade away' as

if withered by the hot wind of the desert. They shall come limping' (as

the word here used signifies), as if wounded in the fight, for which

Psalm xviii. reads trembling.'

Now this vision of extended conquests, based as it is on past smaller

victories, carries valuable lessons. David here lays hold of the great

promises to his house of a wide dominion, and expects the beginnings of

their fulfilment to himself. And he did extend his conquests beyond the

territory of Israel. But we may take the hope as an instance in a

particular direction of what should be the issue of all experience of

God's mercies. To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant.'

Smaller victories will be followed by greater. Our reception of God's

favouring help should widen our anticipations. Our gratitude to Him

should be a lively sense of favours to come.' Progressive victory

should be the experience of every believer.

We may see, too, dimly apparent through the large hope of the

Psalmist-King, the prophecy of the worldwide victories of his Son, in

whom the great promises of a dominion from sea to sea, and from the

river unto the ends of the earth,' are fulfilled.

III. Verses 46-51 make a noble close to a noble hymn, in which the

singer's strong wing never flags, nor the rush of thought and feeling

ever slackens. In it, even more absolutely than in the rest of the

psalm, his victory is all ascribed to Jehovah. He alone acts, David

simply receives. To have learned by experience that' He lives,' and is

my Rock,' and to gather all the feelings excited by the retrospect of a

long life into Blessed be my Rock,' is to have reaped and garnered the

richest harvest which earth can yield. So at last sings the man whose

early years had been full of struggles and privations. A morning of

tempest has cleared into sunny evening calm, as it will with us all if

the tempest blows us into our true shelter.

This psalm begins with a rapturous heaping together of the precious

names of God, as the singer has had them revealed to him by experience.

Foremost among these stands that one, my Rock,' which is caught up

again in this closing burst of thanksgiving. That great Rock towers

unchangeable above fleeting things. The river runs past its base, the

woods nestling at its feet bud, and shed their pride of foliage, but it

stands the same. David had many a time hid in the clefts of the rocks'

in his years of wandering, and the figure is eloquent on his lips.

These closing strains gather together once more the main points of the

previous verses, his deliverance from domestic foes, and his conquests

over external enemies. These are wholly God's work. True thankfulness

delights to repeat its acknowledgments. God does not weary of giving,

we should not weary of praising the Giver and His gifts. We renew our

enjoyment of our long-past mercies by reiterating our thankfulness for

them. They do not die as long as gratitude keeps their remembrance

green.

But the Psalmist's experience impels him to a vow (verse 50). He will

give thanks to God among the nations. God's mercies bind, and, if

rightly felt, will joyfully impel, the receiver to spread His name as

far as his voice can reach. Love is sometimes silent, but gratitude

must speak. The most unmusical voice is tuned to melody by God's great

blessings received and appreciated, and they need never want a theme

who can tell what the Lord has done for their souls. Then shall. . .

the tongue of the dumb sing.' A dumb Christian is a monstrosity. We are

the secretaries of His praise,' and have been saved ourselves that we

may declare His goodness.

Verse 51 has been supposed by some to be a liturgical addition, on the

ground that, if David were the author, he would not be likely to name

himself thus. But there does not seem to be anything unnatural in his

mentioning himself by name in such a connection, and the reference to

his dynasty, based as it is on Nathan's promise, is most fitting. The

last thought about his mercies which the humble gratitude of the

Psalmist utters is that they were not given to him for any good in

himself, nor to be selfishly enjoyed, but that they were bestowed on

him because of the place that he filled in the divine purposes, and

belonged to his seed' as truly as to himself. So lowly had his

prosperity made him. So truly had he sunk himself in his office, and in

the great things that God meant to do through him and his house. We

know better than David did what these were, and how the promise on

which he rested his hopes of the duration of his house is fulfilled in

his Son, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and who bears God's

name to all the nations.

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THE DYING KING'S LAST VISION AND PSALM

Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and

the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob,

and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, 2. The Spirit of the Lord spake

by me, and His word was in my tongue. 3. The God of Israel said, the

Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just,

ruling in the fear of God. 4. And he shall be as the light of the

morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the

tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. 5.

Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an

everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all

my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow. 6.

But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away,

because they cannot be taken with hands: 7. But the man that shall

touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they

shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.'--2 SAMUEL xxiii.

1-7.

It was fitting that the last words of David' should be a prophecy of

the true King, whom his own failures and sins, no less than his

consecration and victories, had taught him to expect. His dying eyes

see on the horizon of the far-off future the form of Him who is to be a

just and perfect Ruler, before the brightness of whose presence and the

refreshing of whose influence, verdure and beauty shall clothe the

world. As the shades gather round the dying monarch, the radiant glory

to come brightens. He departs in peace, having seen the salvation from

afar, and stretched out longing hands of greeting toward it. Then his

harp is silent, as if the rapture which thrilled the trembling strings

had snapped them.

1. We have first a prelude extending to the middle of verse 3. In it

there is first a fourfold designation of the personality of the

Psalmist-prophet, and then a fourfold designation of the divine oracle

spoken through him. The word rendered in verse 1 saith' is really a

noun, and usually employed with the Lord' following, as in the familiar

phrase saith the Lord.' It is used, as here, with the genitive of the

human recipient, in Balaam's prophecy, on which this is evidently

modelled. It distinctly claims a divine source for the oracle

following, and declares, at the outset, that these last words of David

were really the faithful sayings of Jehovah. The human and divine

elements are smelted together. Note the description of the human

personality. First, the natural David the son of Jesse,' like Balaam

the son of Beor' in the earlier oracle. The aged king looks back with

adoring thankfulness to his early days and humble birth, as if he were

saying, Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this

grace given, that I should proclaim the coming King.' Then follow three

clauses descriptive of what the son of Jesse' had been made by the

grace of God, in that he had been raised on high from his low condition

of a shepherd boy, and anointed as ruler, not only by Samuel and the

people, but by the God of their great ancestor, whose career had

presented so many points of resemblance to his own, the God who still

wrought among the nation which bore the patriarch's name, as He had

wrought of old; and that, besides his royalty, he had been taught to

sing the sweet songs which already were the heritage of the nation.

This last designation shows what David counted God's chief gift to

him,--not his crown, but his harp. It further shows that he regarded

his psalms as divinely inspired, and it proves that already they had

become the property of the nation. This first verse heightens the

importance of the subsequent oracle by dwelling on the claims of the

recipient of the revelation to be heard and heeded.

Similarly, the fourfold designation of the divine source has the same

purpose, and corresponds with the four clauses of verse 1, The Spirit

of the Lord spake in [or "into"] me.' That gives the Psalmist's

consciousness that in his prophecy he was but the recipient of a

message. It wonderfully describes the penetrating power of that inward

voice which clearly came to him from without, and as clearly spoke to

him within. Words could not more plainly declare the prophetic

consciousness of the distinction between himself and the Voice which he

heard in the depths of his spirit. It spoke in him before he spoke his

lyric prophecy. His word was upon my tongue.' There we have the

utterance succeeding the inward voice, and the guarantee that the

Psalmist's word was a true transcript of the inward voice. The God of

Israel said,' and therefore Israel is concerned in the divine word,

which is not of private reference, but meant for all. The Rock of

Israel spake,' and therefore Israel may trust the Word, which rests on

His immutable faithfulness and eternal being.

II. The divine oracle thus solemnly introduced and guaranteed must be

worthy of such a prelude. Abruptly, and in clauses without verbs, the

picture of the righteous Ruler is divinely flashed before the seer's

inward eye. The broken construction may perhaps indicate that he is

describing what he beholds in vision. There is no need for any

supplement such as There shall be,' which, however true in meaning,

mars the vividness of the presentation of the Ruler to the prophet's

sight. David sees him painted on the else blank wall of the future.

When and where the realisation may be he knows not. What are the

majestic outlines? A universal sovereign over collective humanity,

righteous and God-fearing. In the same manner as he described the

vision of the King, David goes on, as a man on some height telling what

he saw to the people below, and paints the blessed issues of the King's

coming.

It had been night before He came,--the night of ignorance, sorrow, and

sin,--but His coming is like one of these glorious Eastern sunrises

without a cloud, when everything laughs in the early beams, and, with

tropical swiftness, the tender herbage bursts from the ground, as born

from the dazzling brightness and the fertilising rain. So all things

shall rejoice in the reign of the King, and humanity be productive,

under His glad and quickening influences, of growths of beauty and

fruitfulness impossible to it without these.

The abrupt form of the prophecy has led some interpreters to construe

it as, When a king over men is righteous. . . then it is as a morning,'

etc. But surely such a platitude is not worthy of being David's last

word, nor did it need divine inspiration to disclose to him that a just

king is a great blessing. The only worthy meaning is that which sees

here, in words so solemnly marked as a special revelation closing the

life of David, the vision of the future and all the wonder that should

be,' when a real Person should thus reign over men. The explanation

that we have here simply the ideal of the collective Davidic monarchy

is a lame attempt to escape from the recognition of prophecy properly

so called. It is the work of poetry to paint ideals, of prophecy to

foretell, with God's authority, their realisation. The picture here is

too radiant to be realised in any mere human king, and, as a matter of

fact, never was so in any of David's successors, or in the whole of

them put together. It either swings in vacuo, a dream unrealised, or it

is a distinct prophecy from God of the reign of the coming Messiah, of

whom David and all his sons, as anointed kings, were living prophecies.

The Messianic idea entered on a new stage of development with the

monarchy, and that not as if the history stimulated men's imaginations,

but that God used the history as a means of further revelation by His

prophetic Spirit.

III. The difficult verse 5, whether its first and last clauses be taken

interrogatively or negatively, in its central part bases the assurance

of the coming of the king on God's covenant (2 Samuel vii.), which is

glorified as being everlasting, provided with all requisites for its

realisation, and therefore sure,' or perhaps preserved,' as if guarded

by God's inviolable sanctity and faithfulness. The fulfilment of the

dying saint's hopes depends on God's truth. Whatever sense might say,

or doubt whisper, he silences them by gazing on that great Word. So we

all have to do. If we found our hopes and forecasts on it, we can go

down to the grave calmly, though they be not fulfilled, sure that no

good thing can fail us of all that He hath spoken.' Living or dying,

faith and hope must stay themselves on God's word. Happy they whose

closing eyes see the form of the King, and whose last thoughts are of

God's faithful promise! Happy they whose forecasts of the future,

nearer or more remote, are shaped by His word! Happy they who, in the

triumphant energy of such a faith, can with dying lips proclaim that

His promises overlap, and contain, all their salvation and all their

desire!

If we read the first and last clauses negatively, with Revised Version

and others, they, as it were, surround the kernel of clear-eyed faith,

in the middle of the verse, with a husk, not of doubt, but of

consciousness how far the present is from fulfilling the great promise.

The poor dying king looks back on the scandals of his later reign, on

his own sin, on his children's lust, rebellion, and tragic deaths, and

feels how far from the ideal he and they have been. He sees little

token of growth toward realisation of that promise; but yet in spite of

a stained past and a wintry present, he holds fast his confidence. That

is the true temper of faith, which calls things that are not as though

they were, and is hindered by no sense of unworthiness nor by any

discouragements born of sense, from grasping with full assurance the

promise of God. But the consensus of the most careful expositors

inclines to take both clauses as questions, and then the meaning would

be, Does not my house stand in such a relation to God that the

righteous king will spring from it? It is, in this view, a triumphant

question, expressing the strongest assurance, and the next clause would

then lay bare the foundation of that relation of David's house as not

its goodness, but God's covenant (for He hath made'). Similarly the

last clause would be a triumphant question of certainty, asserting in

the strongest manner that God would cause that future salvation for the

world, which was wrapped up in the coming of the king, and in which the

dying man was sure that he should somehow have a share, dead though he

were, to blossom and grow, though he had to die as in the winter,

before the buds began to swell. The assurance of immortality, and of a

share in all the blessings to come, bursts from the lips that are so

soon to be silent.

IV. But the oracle cannot end with painting only blessings as flowing

from the king's reign. If he is to rule in righteousness and the fear

of the Lord, then he must fight against evil. If his coming causes the

tender grass to spring, it will quicken ugly growths too. The former

representation is only half the truth; and the threatening of

destruction for the evil is as much a part of the divine oracle as the

other. Strictly, it is wickedness'--the abstract quality rather than

the concrete persons who embody it--which is spoken of. May we recall

the old distinction that God loves the sinner while He hates the sin?

The picture is vivid. The wicked--and all the enemies of this King are

wicked, in the prophet's view--are like some of these thorn-brakes,

that cannot be laid hold of, even to root them out, but need to be

attacked with sharp pruning-hooks on long shafts, or burned where they

grow. There is a destructive side to the coming of the King, shadowed

in every prophecy of him, and brought emphatically to prominence in his

own descriptions of his reign and its final issues. It is a poor

kindness to suppress that side of the truth. Thorns as well as tender

grass spring up in the quickening beams; and the best commentary on the

solemn words which close David's closing song is the saying of the King

himself: In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather

up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them.'

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THE ROYAL JUBILEE [1]

. . . He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.

4. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,

even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the

earth, by clear shining after rain.'--2 SAMUEL xxiii. 3, 4.

One of the Psalms ascribed to David sounds like the resolves of a new

monarch on his accession. In it the Psalmist draws the ideal of a king,

and says such things as, I will behave myself wisely, in a perfect way.

I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes. I hate the work of them

that turn aside. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that

they may dwell with me.' That psalm we may regard as the first words of

the king when, after long, weary years, the promise of Samuel's

anointing was fulfilled, and he sat on the throne.

My text comes from what purports to be the last words of the same king.

He looks back, and again the ideal of a monarch rises before him. The

psalm, for it is a psalm, though it is not in the Psalter, is

compressed to the verge of obscurity; and there may be many questions

raised about its translation and its bearing. These do not need to

occupy us now, but the words which I have selected for my text may,

perhaps, best be represented to an English reader in some such sentence

as this--If (or when) one rules over men justly, ruling in the fear of

God, then it shall be as the light of the morning when the sun riseth,

even a morning without clouds.' With such a monarch all the interests

of his people will prosper. His reign will be like the radiant dawn of

a cloudless day, and his land like the spring pastures when the fresh,

green grass is wooed out of the baked earth by the combined influence

of rain and sunshine. David's little kingdom was surrounded by giant

empires, in which brute force, wielded by despotic will, ground men

down, or squandered their lives recklessly. But the King of Israel had

learned, partly by the experience of his own reign, and partly by

divine inspiration, that such rulers are not true types of a monarch

after God's own heart. This ideal king is neither a warrior nor a

despot. Two qualities mark him, Justice and Godliness. Pharaoh and his

like, oppressors, were as the lightning which blasts and scorches. The

true king was to be as the sunshine that vitalises and gladdens. He

shall come down like rain upon the mown grass, and as showers that

water the earth.'

We do not need to ask the question here, though it might be very

relevant on another occasion, whether this portraiture is a mere ideal,

floating in vacuo, or whether it is a direct prophecy of that expected

Messianic king who was to realise the divine ideal of sovereignty. At

all events we know that, in its highest and deepest significance, the

picture of my text has lived and breathed human breath, in Jesus

Christ, who both in His character and in His influence on the world,

fulfilled the ideal that floated before the eyes of the aged king.

I do not need to follow the course of thought in this psalm any

farther. You will have anticipated my motive for selecting this text

now. It seems to me to gather up, in vivid and picturesque form, the

thoughts and feelings which to-day are thrilling through an Empire, to

which the most extended dominion of these warrior kings of old was but

a speck. On such an occasion as this I need not make any apology, I am

sure, for diverging from the ordinary topics of pulpit address, and

associating ourselves with the many millions who to-day are giving

thanks for Queen Victoria.

My text suggests two lines along which the course of our thoughts may

run. The one is the personal character of this ideal monarch; the other

is its effects on his subjects.

I. Now, with regard to the former, the pulpit is, in my judgment, not

the place either for the discussion of current events or the

pronouncing of personal eulogiums. But I shall not be wandering beyond

my legitimate province, if I venture to try to gather into a few words

the reasons, in the character and public life of our Queen, for the

thankfulness of this day. Our text brings out, as I have said, two

great qualities as those on which a throne is to be established,

Justice and Godliness. Now, the ancient type of monarch was the

fountain of justice, in a very direct sense; inasmuch as it was his

office, not only to pronounce sentence on criminals, but to give

decisions on disputed questions of right. These functions have long

ceased to be exercised by our monarchs, but there is still room for

both of those qualities--the Justice which holds an even balance

between parties and strifes, the Righteousness which has supreme regard

to the primary duties that press alike upon prince and pauper, and the

Godliness which, as I believe, is the root from which all

righteousness, as between man and man, and as between prince and

subject, must ever flow. Morality is the garb of religion; religion is

the root of morality. He, and only he, will hold an even balance and

discharge his obligations to man, whose life is rooted in, and his acts

under the continual influence of, the fear of God which has in it no

torment, but is the parent of all things good.

We shall not be flatterers if we thankfully recognise in our Sovereign

Lady the presence of both these qualities. I have spoken of the first

inaugural words of the King of Israel, and the resolutions that he

made. It is recorded that when, to the child of eleven years of age,

the announcement was made that she stood near in the line of succession

to the throne, the tremulous young lips answered, It is a great

responsibility; but I will be good.' And all round the world to-day her

subjects attest that the aged monarch has kept the little maiden's vow.

Contrast that life with the lives of the other women who have sat on

the throne of England. Think of the brilliant Queen, whose glories our

greatest poets were not ashamed to sing, with the Tudor masterfulness

in her, and not a little of the Tudor grossness and passion, and

remember the blots that stained her glories. Think of her sister, the

morbidly melancholy tool of priests, who goes down the ages branded

with an epithet only too sadly earned. Think of another woman that

ruled over England in name, the weak instrument of base intrigues. And

then turn to this life which we are looking upon to-day. Think of the

nameless scandals, the hideous immorality of the reigns that preceded

hers, and you will not wonder that every decent man and every modest

woman was thankful that, with the young girl, there came a breath of

purer air into the foul atmosphere. I am old enough to remember

hearing, as a boy, the talk of my elders as to the probabilities of

insurrection if, instead of our Queen, there had come to the throne the

brother of her two predecessors. The hopes of those early days have

been more than fulfilled.

It is not for us to determine the religious character of others, and

that is too sacred a region for us to enter; but this we may say, that

in all these sixty years of diversified trial, there has been no act

known to us outsiders inconsistent with the highest motive, the fear of

the Lord; and some of us who have worshipped in the humble Highland

church where she has bowed have felt that on the throne of Britain sat

a Christian.

Nor need we forget how, from that root of fear of God, there has come

that wondrous patience and faithfulness to duty, the form of Justice'

which is possible for a constitutional monarch. We have little notion

of how pressing and numerous and continual the royal duties must

necessarily be. They have been discharged, even when the blow that

struck all sunshine out of life left an irrepressible shrinking from

pageantry and pomp. Joys come; joys go. Duties abide, and they have

been done.

Nor can we forget, either, how the very difficult position of a

constitutional monarch, with the semblance of power and the reality of

narrow restrictions, has been filled. Our Sovereign has never set

herself against the will of the people, expressed by its legitimate

representatives, even when that will may have imposed upon her the

sanction of changes which she did not approve. And that is much to say.

We have seen young despots whose self-will has threatened to wreck a

nation's prosperity.

Nor can we forget how all the immense influence of position and

personality has been thrown on the side of purity and righteousness.

Even we outsiders know how, more than once or twice, she has

steadfastly set her face against the admission to her presence of men

and women of evil repute, and has in effect repeated David's

proclamation against vice and immorality at his accession: He that

worketh wickedness shall not dwell within my house.'

Nor must we forget, either, the simplicity, the beauty, the tenderness

of her wedded and family life, her love of rural quiet, and of

wholesome communion with Nature, and her eagerness to take her people

into her confidence, as set forth in the book which, whatever its

literary merits, speaks of her earnest appreciation of Nature and her

wish for the sympathy of her subjects.

Then came the bolt from the blue, that sudden crash that wrecked the

happiness of a life. Many of us, I have no doubt, remember that dreary

December Sunday morning when, while the nation was standing in

expectation of another calamity from across the Atlantic, there flashed

through the land the news of the Prince's death; thrilling all hearts,

and bringing all nearer to her, the lonely widow, than they had ever

been in her days of radiant happiness. How pathetically, silently,

nobly, devoutly, that sorrow has been borne, it is not for us to speak.

She has become one of the great company of sad and lonely hearts, and

in her sadness has shown an eager desire to send messages of sympathy

to all whom she could reach, who were in like darkness and sorrow.

Brethren, I have ventured to diverge so far from the ordinary run of

pulpit ministrations because I feel that to-day all of us, whatever may

be our political or ecclesiastical relationships and proclivities, are

one in thanking God for the monarch whose life has been without a

stain, and her reign without a blot.

II. Now let me say a word as to the other line of thought which my text

suggests, the effect of such a reign on the condition of the subject.

Now, of course, in the narrowly limited domain of that strange

creation, a constitutional monarchy, there is far less opportunity for

the Sovereign's direct influence on the Subject than there was in the

ancient kingdoms of which David was thinking in his psalm. The

marvellous progress of Britain during these sixty years is due, not to

our Sovereign, but to a multitude of strenuous workers and earnest

thinkers in a hundred different departments, as well as to the

evolution of the gifts that come down to us from our ancient

inheritance of freedom. But we shall much mistake if, for that reason,

we set aside the monarch's character and influence as of no account in

the progress

A supposition, which is a violent one, may be made which will set this

matter in clearer light. Suppose that during these sixty years we had

had a king on the throne of England like some of the kings we have had.

The sentiment of loyalty is not now of such a character as that it will

survive a vicious sovereign. If we had had such a monarch as I have

hinted at, the loyalty of the good would for all these years have been

suffering a severe strain, and the forces that make for evil would have

been disastrously strengthened. Dangers escaped are unnoticed, but one

twelvemonth of the reign of a profligate would shake the foundations of

the monarchy, and would open the floodgates of vice; and we should then

know how much the nation owed to the Queen whose life was pure, and who

cast all her influence on the side of things that are lovely and of

good report.'

Take another supposition. Suppose that during these years of wonderful

transition, when the whole aspect of English politics and society has

been transformed, we had had a king like George III., who set his

opinion against the nation's will constitutionally expressed. Then no

man knows with what storm and tumult, with what strife and injury, the

inevitable transition would have been effected. Be sure of this, that

the wise self-effacement of our Sovereign during these critical years

of change is largely the reason why they have been years of peace, in

which the new has mingled itself with the old without revolution or

disturbance. It is due to her in a very large degree that

Freedom broadens slowly down

From precedent to precedent.'

I need not dilate on the changed Britain that she looks out upon and

rules to-day. I need not speak--there will be many voices to do that,

in not altogether agreeable notes, for there will be a dash of too much

self-complacency in them--about progress in material wealth, colonial

expansion, the increase of education, the gentler manners, the new life

that has been breathed over art and literature, the achievements in

science and philosophy, the drawing together of classes, the bridging

over of the great gulf between rich and poor by some incipient and

tentative attempts at sympathy and brotherhood.

Nor need I dwell upon the ecclesiastical signs of the times, in which,

mingled as they are, there is at least this one great good, that never

since the early days have so large a proportion of Christian men been

seeking after the things that make for peace,' and realising the

oneness of all believers who hold the Headship of Christ.

All this review falls more properly into other hands than mine. Only I

would put in a caution--do not let us mingle self-conceit with our

congratulations; and, above all, do not let us rest and be thankful.'

There is much to be done yet. Listening ears can catch on every side

vague sounds that tell of unrest and of the stirrings into wakefulness

of

The spirit of the years to come,

Yearning to mix itself with life.'

I seem to hear all around me the rushing in the dark of a mighty

current that is bearing down upon us. Great social questions are

rapidly coming to the front--the questions of distribution of wealth,

abolition of privilege, the relations of labour and capital, and many

others are clamant to be dealt with at least, if not solved. There Is

much to be done before Jesus Christ is throned as King of England. War

has to be frowned down; the brotherhood of man has to be realised,

temperance has to be much more largely practised than it is.

I need not go over the catalogue of desiderata, of agenda--things that

have to be done--in the near future. Only this I would say--Christian

men and women are the last people who should be ready to rest and be

thankful,' for the principles of the Gospel that we profess, which have

never been applied to the life of nations as they ought to be, will

solve the questions which make the despair of so many in this

generation. We shall best express our thankfulness for these past sixty

years by each of us taking our part in the great movement which, in the

inevitable drift of things to democracy, is going to cast the kingdom

old into another mould,' and which will, I pray, make our people more

of what John Milton long ago called them, God's Englishmen.' We have

taught the nations many things. Our Parliament is called the Mother of

Parliaments. Ours is

The land where, girt with friends or foes,

A man may say the thing he will.'

It has taught the nations a tempered freedom, and that a monarchy may

be a true republic. May we rise to the height of our privileges and

responsibilities, and teach our subject peoples, not only mechanics,

science, law, free trade, but a loftier morality, and the name of Him

by whom kings reign and princes decree justice!

We, members of the free Churches of England, come seldom under the

notice of royalty, and have little acquaintance with courts, but we

yield to none in our recognition of the virtues and in our sympathy

with the sorrows of the Sovereign Lady, the good woman, who rules these

lands, and we all heartily thank God for her to-day, and pray that for

long years still to come the familiar letters V.R. may stand, as they

have stood to two generations, as the symbol of womanly purity and of

the faithful discharge of queenly duty.

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[1] Preached on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee.

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A LIBATION TO JEHOVAH

And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the

water of the well of Beth-lehem, which is by the gate! 16. And the

three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew

water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that was by the gate, and took it

and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but

poured it out unto the Lord. 17. And he said, Be it far from me, O

Lord, that I should do this; is not this the blood of the men that went

in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These

things did these three mighty men.'--2 SAMUEL xxiii. 15-17.

David's fortunes were at a low ebb. He was in hiding in his cave of

Adullam, and a Philistine garrison held Bethlehem, his native place. He

was little different from an outlaw at the head of a band of broken

men,' but there were depths of chivalry and poetry in his heart.

Sweltering in his cave in the fierce heat of harvest, he thought of his

native Bethlehem; he remembered the old days when he had watered his

flock at the well by its gate, or mingled with the people of the little

town, in their evening assemblies round it. The memories of boyhood

rose up radiant before him, and as he was immersed in the past, the

grim present, the perils that threatened his life, the savage, gaunt

rocks without a trace of greenness that girded him, the privations to

which he was exposed, were all forgotten, and he longed for one more

draught of the water that tasted so cool and sweet to memory. Three of

his mighty men,' bound to him by loyal devotion and unselfish love,

were ready to die to win for their chief a momentary gratification. So

they slipped away from Adullam, brake through the host of the

Philistines,' and brought back the longed-for draught. David's

reception of the dearly-bought, sparkling gift was due to a noble

impulse. The water seemed to him to be dyed with blood, and to be not

water so much as lives of men.' It had become too precious to be used

to satisfy his longing. It would be base self-indulgence to drink what

had been won by such self-forgetting devotion. God only had the right

to receive what men had risked their lives to obtain, and therefore he

poured it out unto the Lord.'

The story gleams out of the fierce narratives in which it is embedded,

like a flower blooming on some grim cliff. May we not learn lessons

from it?

I. David's longing.

David, a fugitive in the cave, haunted by the nostalgia' that made

Bethlehem seem so fair and dear, may stand for us as an example of the

longings and thirsts that sometimes force themselves into consciousness

in every soul. Below the bustle and strife of daily life, occupied as

it must be with material and often ignoble things, below the hardness

into which the world has compressed men's surface nature, there lies a

yearning for the cool water that rises hard by the gate of our native

home. True, it is with many of us overlaid for the most part by coarser

desires, and may be as unlike our usual dominant longings and aims, as

David's tender outbreak of sentiment was to the prevailing tenor of his

life, in those days when he was an outlaw and a freebooter. But the

longing, though often stifled, is not wholly quenched. It is

misinterpreted by the man who is conscious of it, and far too often he

tries to slake the thirst by fiery and drugged liquors which but make

it more intense. Happy are they who know what it is that their parched

palates crave, and have learned, while yet the knowledge avails, to

say, My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God'! Blessed are they

who thirst after' the water of the well of Bethlehem, for they shall be

filled!'

II. The three heroes' devotion.

These three rough soldiers, lawless and fierce as they were, had been

so mastered by their chief that they were ready to dare anything to

pleasure him. Who would have looked for such delicacy of feeling and

such enthusiastic self-surrender in such men?

They stand as grand instances of the height of devotion of which the

rudest nature is capable, when once its love and loyalty to the Beloved

are evoked.

How such deeds ennoble the lowest types of character, and make us think

better of men, and more sadly of the contrast between their habitual

characteristics and the possibilities that lie slumbering in their

ignoble lives! There are sparks in the hard cold flint, if only they

could be struck out. There is water in the rock, if only the right

hand, armed with the wonder-working rod, smites it.

Let us not judge men too harshly by what they do and are, but let us

try to bring their sleeping possibilities into conscious exercise.

Let us remember that love and self-sacrifice, which is the very outcome

and natural voice of love, ennoble the most degraded.

But these heroic three may suggest to us a sadder thought. They were

ready to die for David; would they have been as ready to die for God?

These noble emotions of love, leading to glad flinging away of life to

pleasure the beloved, are freely given to men, but too often withheld

from God, We lavish on our beloveds or on our chosen leaders, a

devotion that ought to shame us, when contrasted with the scantiness of

our grudging devotion and self-surrender to Him. If we loved God a

tenth part as ardently as we love our wives or husbands or parents or

children, and were willing to do and bear as much for Him as we are

willing to bear for them, how different our lives would be! We can love

utterly, enthusiastically, self-forget-tingly, absorbed in the beloved,

and counting all surrender of self to, and the sacrifice of life itself

for, him or her a delight. Many of us do love men so. Do we love God

so?

But these heroic three may suggest another thought. Their

self-sacrificing love was illustrious; but there is a nobler, more

wonderful, more soul-subduing instance of such love. They broke through

the ranks of the Philistines to bring David a draught from the well of

Bethlehem. Jesus has broken through the ranks of our enemies to bring

us the water of which if a man drink, he shall live for ever.' If we

would see the highest example of self-sacrificing love, we must turn to

look, not on the instances of it that shine through the ages on the

page of history, and make men thrill as they gaze, and think better of

the human nature that can do such things, but on the Christ hanging on

the Cross because He loved those who did not love Him, and giving His

life a ransom for sinners.

III. David's reception of the water.

The chivalrous devotion of the three touched an answering chord in

their chivalrous chief. His heart filled at the thought of what they

had risked, and revolted from employing what had been thus won for no

higher use than to gratify a piece of sentiment in himself. The

sparkling water was too sacred to be taken for any baser use than as a

libation to Jehovah. And who can doubt that the three were more fully

repaid for their devotion, as David poured it out unto the Lord, than

if he had drunk it eagerly up? His feeling and his act indicate

beautiful delicacy of instinct, and swiftness of perception of how to

requite the devotion of the three.

We may separate into its two parts the generous impulse which sprang as

one whole in David's breast. There was the shrinking from using the

water to slake his thirst merely, and there was the resolve to pour it

out as a libation to God. Both parts of that whole may yield us

profitable thoughts.

To risk their lives for the water was noble in the three; to have

quaffed it as if it had been drawn like any other water from a well,

would have been ignoble in David. There are things that it may be noble

to give and ignoble to accept. There are sacrifices which we are not

entitled to allow others to make for our sakes. Gratifications which

can only be procured at the hazard of men's lives are too dearly

bought.

Would not a civilisation, that draws much of its comforts and

appliances from sweated industries,' and is languidly amused by seeing

men and women performers peril their lives nightly, and lose them too,

for its gratification, be the better for copying David's recoil from

drinking the blood of men that went in jeopardy of their lives'? Is

there not blood' on many a woman's ball-dress, on many an article of

luxury, on many an amusement?

There are sacrifices which we have no right to accept from others. The

three had no right to risk life for such a purpose, and David would

have been selfish if he had drunk the water. Do not such thoughts lead

us by contrast to Him who has done what none other can do? None of them

can by any means redeem his brother, nor give his life a ransom for

him'; but Jesus can and Jesus does, and what it would be impossible,

and wrong if it were possible, for one man to do for another, He has

done for us all, and what it would be base for a man to accept from

another if that other could give it, it is blessed and the beginning of

all nobleness of character for us to accept from Him. David would not

drink because the cup seemed to him to be red with blood. Jesus offers

to us a cup, not of cold water only but of water and blood,' and bids

us drink of it and remember Him.

The generous devotion of the three kindled answering emotions in

David's breast. It would be a churlish soul that was not warmed into

some faint replica of such self-sacrifice, and most of us would be

ashamed of ourselves if we were unmoved by such love. But does the

supreme example of it affect us as much as the lesser examples of it

do? How many of us stand before it like the peaks of the Alps that

front full south, and lift an unmelted breastplate of snow to the

midday sun! How many of us have lived all our lives in presence of

Jesus' infinite love and self-surrender for us each, and never have

felt one transient touch of answering love!

The other part of David's impulse was to offer to God what was too

precious for his own use. That is the fitting destination of our most

precious and prized possessions. And whatever is thus offered becomes

more precious by being offered. The altar sanctifies and enhances the

worth of the gift. What we give to God is more our own than if we had

kept it to ourselves, and develops richer capacities of ministering to

our delight. It is so with our greatest surrender, the surrender of

ourselves. When we give ourselves to Jesus, He renders us back to

ourselves, far better worth having than before. We are never so much

our own as when we are wholly Christ's. And the same thing is true as

to all our riches of mind, heart, or worldly wealth. If we wish to

taste their most delicate and refined sweetness, let us give them to

Jesus, and the touch of His hand, as He accepts them and gives them

back to us, will leave a lingering fragrance that nothing else can

impart. Was not the water from the well of Bethlehem sweeter to David

as he poured it out unto the Lord than if he had greedily gulped it

down?

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THE FIRST BOOK OF KINGS

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DAVID APPOINTING SOLOMON

Then king David answered and said, Call me Bath-sheba. And she came

into the king's presence, and stood before the king. 29. And the king

sware, and said, As the Lord liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of

all distress, 30. Even as I sware unto thee by the Lord God of Israel,

saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall

sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day.

31. Then Bath-sheba bowed with her face to the earth, and did reverence

to the king, and said, Let my lord king David live for ever. 32. And

king David said, Call me Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, and

Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. 33. The

king also said unto them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and

cause Solomon my son to ride upon mine own mule, and bring him down to

Gihon: 34. And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him

there king over Israel: and blow ye with the trumpet, and say, God save

king Solomon. 35. Then ye shall come up after him, that he may come and

sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead: and I have

appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah. 36. And Benaiah

the son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen; the Lord God of

my lord the king say so too. 37. As the Lord hath been with my lord the

king, even so be he with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the

throne of my lord king David. 38. So Zadok the priest, and Nathan the

prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the

Pelethites, went down, and caused Solomon to ride upon king David's

mule, and brought him to Gihon. 39. And Zadok the priest took an horn

of oil out of the tabernacle, and anointed Solomon. And they blew the

trumpet; and all the people said, God save king Solomon.'--1 KINGS i.

28-39.

The earlier part of this chapter must be taken into account in order to

get the right view of this incident. David's eldest surviving son,

Adonijah, had claimed the succession, and gathered his partisans to a

feast. Nathan, alarmed at the prospect of such a successor, had

arranged with Bathsheba that she should go to David and ask his public

confirmation of his promise to her that Solomon should succeed him, and

that then Nathan should seek an audience while she was with the king,

and, as independently, should prefer the same request.

The plan was carried out, and here we see its results. The old king was

roused to a flash of his ancient vigour, confirmed his oath to

Bathsheba, and promptly cut the ground from under Adonijah's feet by

sending for the three who had remained true to him--Nathan, Benaiah,

and Zadok--and despatching them without a moment's delay to proclaim

Solomon king, and then to bring him up to the palace and enthrone him.

The swift execution of these decisive orders, and the burst of popular

acclamation which welcomed Solomon's accession, shattered the nascent

conspiracy, and its supporters scattered in haste, to preserve their

lives. The story may be best dealt with, for our purpose, by taking

this brief summary and trying to draw lessons from it.

I. It points anew the truth that whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he

also reap.' As Absalom, so Adonijah, had been spoiled by David's

over-indulgence (verse 6), and having never had his wishes checked, was

now letting his unbridled wishes hurry him into rebellion. Nor was that

fault of David's the only one which brought about the miserable

squabbles round his deathbed, as to who should wear the crown which had

not yet fallen from his head. Eastern monarchies are familiar with

struggles for the crown between the sons of different mothers when

their father dies. David had indulged in a multitude of wives, and his

last days were darkened by the resulting intrigues of his sons. No

doubt, too, Solomon was disliked by his brethren as the child of

Bathsheba, and the shame of David's crime was an obstacle in his

younger son's way. Thus, as ever, his evil deeds came home to roost,

and the poisonous seed which he had sown grew up and waved, a bitter

harvest, which he had to reap. Repentance and forgiveness did not

neutralise the natural consequences of his sin. Nor will they do so for

us. God often leaves them to be experienced, that the experience may

make us hate the sins the more.

II. The sad defection to Adonijah of such tried friends as Joab and

Abiathar has its lesson. The reason for Joab's treachery is plain. He

had been steadily drifting away from David for years. His fierce temper

could not brook the king's displeasure on account of his murders of

Abner and Amasa, and his slaying of Absalom had made the breach

irreparable. No doubt, David had made him feel that he loved and

trusted him no longer; and his old comrade in many a fight, Benaiah,

had stepped into the place which he had once filled. Professional

rivalry had darkened into bitter bate. Joab commanded the native-born

Israelites; Benaiah, the Cherethites and Pelethites,' who are now

generally regarded as foreign mercenaries. They were David's bodyguard,

and were probably as heartily hated by Joab and the other Israelite

soldiers as they were trusted by David. So there were reasons enough

for Joab's abetting an insurrection which would again make him the

foremost soldier. He wanted to be indispensable, and would prop the

throne as long as its occupant looked only to him as its defender.

Besides, he probably felt that he would have little chance of winning

distinction in a kingdom which was to be a peaceful one.

Abiathar's motives are unexplained, but if we notice that he had been

obliged to acquiesce in the irregular arrangement of putting the

high-priest's office into commission, we can understand that he bore no

goodwill to Zadok, his colleague, or to David for making the latter so.

Self was at the bottom of these two renegades' action. The fair

fellowship, which had been made the closer because of dangers and

privations faced together, crumbled away before the disintegrating

influences of petty personal jealousies. When once self-regard gets in,

it is like the trickle of water in the cracks of a rock, which freezes

in winter and splits the hardest stone. No common action for a great

cause is possible without the suppression of sidelong looks towards

private advantage. Joab and Abiathar tarnished a life's devotion and

broke sacred bonds, because they thought of themselves rather than of

God's will. Surely they must have had some pangs as they sat at

Adonijah's feast, when they thought of the decrepit old king lying in

his chamber up on Zion, and remembered what he and they had come

through together.

III. We may note the pathetic picture of decaying old age which is seen

in David. He was not very old in years, being about seventy, but he was

a worn-out man. His early hardships had told on him, and now he lay in

the inner chamber, the shadow of himself. His love for Bathsheba had

died down, as would appear both from her demeanour before him, and from

her ignorance of his intentions as to his successor. She was little or

nothing to him now. He seems to have been torpidly unaware of what was

going on. The noise of Adonijah's revels had not disturbed his quiet.

He had not even taken the trouble to designate his successor, though

the eyes of all Israel were upon him that he should tell who was to sit

on his throne after him' (v. 20). Such neglect was criminal in the

circumstances, and brings out forcibly the weary indifference which had

crept over him. Contrast that picture with the early days of swift

energy and eager interest in all things. Is this half-comatose old man

the David who flashed like a meteor and struck swift as a thunderbolt

but a few years before? Yes, and a like collapse of power befalls us

all, if life is prolonged. Those who most need the lesson will be least

touched by it; but let not the young glory in their strength, for it

soon fades away; and let them give the vigour of their early days to

God, that, when the years come in which they shall say, I have no

pleasure in them,' they may be able, like David, to look back over a

long life and say, with him, that the Lord hath redeemed my soul out of

all adversity.'

IV. We note the flash of fire which blazed up in the dying embers of

David's life. The old lion could be roused yet, and could strike when

roused. It took much to shake him out of his torpor. Nathan's plan of

bringing the double influence of Bathsheba and himself to bear was

successful beyond what he had hoped. All that they desired was a formal

declaration of Solomon as successor. They knew that the king's name was

still dear enough to all Israel to ensure that his wish would settle

the succession; and they would have been content to have left the

actual entrance of Solomon on office till after David's death, so sure

were they that his word was still a spell. But the old king, shaking

off his languor, as a lion does the drops from his mane, goes beyond

their wishes, and strikes one decisive blow as with a great paw, and no

second is needed. Without a moment's delay, he sends for the trusty

three, and bids them act on the instant. So down to Gihon goes the

procession, with the youthful prince seated on his father's mule, in

token of his accession, the trusty bodyguard round him with Benaiah at

their head, and the great prophet Nathan, side by side with the

high-priest Zadok, representing the divine sanction of the solemn act.

It would take stronger men than the spoiled Adonijah and his revellers

to upset anything which that determined company resolved to do. The lad

is anointed with the holy oil which Zadok as high-priest had the right

to bring forth from the temporary sanctuary. That signified and

effected the communication from above of qualifications for the kingly

office, and indicated divine appointment. Then out blared the trumpets,

and the glad people shouted God save the king!' What thoughts filled

the young heart of Solomon as he stood silent there his vision in

Gibeon may partly tell. But the distant roar of acclaim reached

Adonijah and his gang as they sat at their too hasty banquet.

They had begun at the wrong end. The feast should have closed, not

inaugurated, the dash for the crown. They who feast when they should

fight are likely to end their mirth with sorrow. David's one stroke was

enough. They were as sure as Nathan and Bathsheba had been that the

declaration of his wish would carry all Israel with it, and so they saw

that the game was up, and there was a rush for dear life. The empty

banqueting-hall proclaimed the collapse of a rebellion which had no

brains to guide it, and no reason to justify it. Let us learn that,

though the race is not always to the swift,' promptitude of action,

when we are sure of God's will, is usually a condition of success. Life

is too short, and the work to be done too pressing and great, to allow

of dawdling. I made haste, and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy

commandments.' Let us learn, too, from Adonijah's fiasco, to see the

end of a thing before we commit ourselves to it, and to have the work

done first before we think of the feast.

Nathan and Bathsheba and David all believed that God had willed

Solomon's succeeding to the throne. No doubt, the reason for their

belief was the divine word to David through Nathan (2 Samuel vii. 12),

which designated a son not yet born as his successor, and therefore

excluded Adonijah as well as Absalom. But, while they believed this,

they did not therefore let Adonijah work his will, and leave God to

carry out His purposes. Their belief animated their action. They knew

what God willed, and therefore they worked strenuously to effect that

will. We may bewilder our brains with speculations about the relation

between God's sovereignty and man's freedom, but, when it comes to

practical work, we have to put out the best and most that is in us to

prevent God's will from being thwarted by rebellious men, and to ensure

its being carried into effect through our efforts, for we are God's

fellow-workers.'

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A YOUNG MAN'S WISE CHOICE OF WISDOM

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God

said, Ask what I shall give thee. 6. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed

unto Thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked

before Thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart

with Thee; and Thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that Thou

hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7. And

now, O Lord my God, Thou hast made Thy servant king instead of David my

father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come

in. 8. And Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people which Thou hast

chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for

multitude. 9. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart to

judge Thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is

able to judge this Thy so great a people? 10. And the speech pleased

the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11. And God said unto him,

Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long

life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of

thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern

judgment; 12. Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have

given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none

like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto

thee. 13. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked,

both riches and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings

like unto thee all thy days. 14. And if thou wilt walk in My ways, to

keep My statutes and My commandments, as thy father David did walk,

then I will lengthen thy days. 15. And Solomon awoke; and, behold, It

was a dream. And he came to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark of the

covenant of the Lord, and offered up burnt offerings, and offered peace

offerings, and made a feast to all his servants.'--1 KINGS iii. 5-15.

The new king was apparently some nineteen or twenty years old on his

accession. He stepped at once out of seclusion and idleness to bear the

whole weight of the kingdom. The glories of David's reign, his brother

Adonijah's pretensions to the crown, the smouldering hostility of

Saul's old partisans, made his position difficult and his throne

unsteady. No doubt, the weight of too much dignity' pressed on the

youth, and this dream found a point of origin in his waking thoughts.

God does not thus reveal Himself to men who seek Him not; and the offer

in the vision is but the repetition of what Solomon felt in many a

waking moment of meditation that God was saying to him, and the choice

he makes in it is the choice that he had already made. He who seeks

wisdom first is already wise.

I. Note the wide possibilities opened by the divine offer. Our

narrative brings that gracious offer into connection with Solomon's

lavish sacrifice before the Tabernacle at Gibeon. God loveth a cheerful

giver' and because these thousand burnt offerings meant devotion and

thankfulness, therefore He who lets no man be the poorer for what he

gives to Him, and is honoured most, not by our givings to, but by our

takings from Him, comes in the quiet night, and puts the key of all His

treasures into the young king's hands. In a very real sense this divine

voice is but the putting into words of the fact as to every young life.

The all but boundless possibilities before every young man and woman

give solemnity to their position, which they too often do not recognise

till youth is past. The future lies blank before them, ready to receive

what they choose to write on its page. Once written, it is indelible.

They are still free from the limitations of habit and associations.

They have still the capacity and the opportunity of choice. There are

limits, of course, but still it is scarcely exaggeration to say that a

man may become almost anything he likes, if he strongly wills it when

young, and sticks to his resolve. When the liquid iron flows from the

blast furnace, it may be run into any mould; but it soon cools and

hardens, and obstinately keeps its shape, in spite of hammers.

If young men and women could but see the possibilities of their youth,

and the issues that hang on early choice, as clearly as they will see

them some day, there would be fewer wasted mornings of life and fewer

gloomy sunsets. But the misery is that so many do not choose at all,

but just let things slide, and allow themselves to be moulded by

whatever influence happens to be strongest. For one man who goes wrong

by deliberate choice, with open eyes, there are twenty who simply

drift. Unfortunately, there is more evil than good in the world; and if

a lad takes his colour from his surroundings, the chances are terribly

against his coming to anything high, noble, or pure. This world is no

place for a man who cannot say No.' If we are like the weeds in a

stream, and let it decide which way we shall point, we shall be sure to

point downwards. It would do much to secure the choice of the Good, if

there were a clear recognition by all young persons of the fact that

they have the choice to make, and are really making it unconsciously.

If they could be brought, like Solomon, to put their ruling wish into

plain words, many who are not ashamed to yield to unworthy desires

would be ashamed to speak them out baldly. Let each ask himself,

Suppose that I had to say out what I want most, dare I avow before my

own conscience, to say nothing of God, what it is?

Looked at from a somewhat different point of view, God's offer to

Solomon presupposes God's knowledge and approval of his wishes. He does

not give blank cheques to those whom He cannot trust to fill them up

rightly. When James and John tried to commit Jesus to a blind promise

that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall ask of Thee,' their

answer was a question as to what they wished. Delight thyself also in

the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' God loves

us too well to let us have carte blanche unless our wills run parallel

with His. He is a foolish and cruel father who promises compliance with

all his child's unknown wishes. Not such is our Father's loving

discipline. It is to those who abide in Christ,' and have Him abiding

in them, moulding their longings and prayers, that the great promise is

sealed: Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.'

II. Note next the wise choice of wisdom. Had not Solomon been wise

before, he had not known the worth of wisdom. The dunghill cocks of

this world cannot know the price of this pearl; those that have it know

that all other excellencies are but trash and rubbish unto it.'

Solomon's prayer shows the temper with which he entered on his reign.

There is no exultation; his serious and clear-eyed spirit sees in rule

a heavy task. He contrasts his inexperienced rawness with the truth and

righteousness' and veteran maturity of his great predecessor, and

trembles to think that he, a mere lad, sits on David's throne. But he

pleads with God that He has made him king, and implies that therefore

God is bound to fit him for his office. That is the boldness permitted

to faith,--to remind God of His own past acts, which pledge Him to give

what He has put us into circumstances to need. With beautiful humility,

Solomon dwells on his youth and inexperience, and on the vastness of

the charge laid on him. All these considerations are the motives for

his choice of a gift, and also pleas with God to grant his request.

He asks for the practical wisdom needed for ruling in these old days,

when the king was judge as well as ruler and captain. Was this the

highest gift that he could have asked or received? Surely the deep

longings of his father for communion with God were yet better. No doubt

the wisdom' of the Book of Proverbs is religion and morality as well as

true thinking, but the understanding heart to judge Thy people' which

Solomon asked and received is narrower and more secular in its meaning.

There is no sign in his biography that he ever had the deep inward

devotion of his father. After the poet-psalmist came the prosaic and

keen-sighted shrewd man of affairs. The one breathed his ardent soul

into psalms, which feed devotion to-day; the other crystallised his

discernment in three thousand proverbs,' and, though his songs were one

thousand and five' they touched a lower range, both of poetry and

religious feeling, than his father's, as may be expressed by calling

them songs,' not psalms.'

But though the request is not the highest, it may well be taken as a

pattern by the young. Note the view of his position from which it

rises. To Solomon dignity meant duty; and his crown was not a toy, but

a task. The responsibilities, not the enjoyments, of his station were

uppermost in his mind. That is the only right view to take. Youth is

meant to be enthusiastic, and to feed its aspirations on noble ideals,

and if, instead of that, it does as too many do, especially in

countries where wealth abounds, namely, regards life as a garden of

delights, or sometimes as a sty where young men may wallow in

pleasures,' then farewell to all hopes of high achievements or of an

honourable career. Youthful ideals will fade fast enough; but alas for

the life which had none to begin with! Note the sense of insufficiency

for his task. Youth is prone to be over-confident, and to think that it

can do better than its fathers, who were as confident in their time.

There is a false humility which flattens the spirit and keeps from

plain duty; and there is a true lowliness which feels that the task

must be attempted, though the heart may shrink, and which impels to

prayer for fitness not its own. He who tells God his consciousness of

impotence, and asks Him to supply His strength to its weakness and His

wisdom to its inexperience, will never shirk work because it is too

great, nor ever fail to find power according to his need.

III. Note God's answer. Solomon gets his wish, and much which he had

not asked besides. The divine answer is in two parts. First, the

reasons for the large gift; and second, the details of the gift. His

not wishing material good was the very reason why he obtained it. That

is not always so; for often enough a man whose whole nature is

sharpened to one point, in the intensity of his desire to make money,

will succeed. But what then? He will be none the better, but the

poorer, for his wealth. But this is always true,--that the people who

do not make worldly good their first object are the people who can be

most safely trusted with it, and who get most enjoyment out of it.

Whether in the precise form of the gift to Solomon or not, outward good

does attend a life which sets duty before pleasure, and desires most to

be able to do it. All earthly good is exalted by being put second, and

degraded as well as corrupted by being put first. The water lapped up

in the palm, as the soldier marches, is sweeter than the abundant

draughts swilled down by self-indulgence. Seek ye first the kingdom of

God, . . . and all these things shall be added unto you.'

Note the largeness of the gift. When God is pleased with a man's

prayers, He gives more than was asked, and so teaches us to be ashamed

of the smallness of our expectations, and widens our desires by His

overlapping bestowments. First, He gives the wisdom asked. Dependence

on God, rising from the sense of our own ignorance, has a wonderful

power of bringing illumination, even as to small matters of practical

duty. Solomon asked it, to guide him in his judicial decisions; and the

first case to which it was applied, when received, was a miserable

quarrel between two disreputable women. A devout heart, purged from

self-conceit, is often gifted with a piercing wisdom before which the

crafty shrewdness of the world is abashed. We cannot be wise as

serpents' unless we are harmless as doves.' The world may think such

wisdom' folly, but she will be justified of her children.' Is the

saying of James's Epistle a reminiscence of Solomon's dream, If any of

you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, . . . and it shall be given him'?

Then follows the grant of the unasked goods,--riches, honour, and

length of days. Surely we hear an echo of these promises in that

magnificent description of Wisdom in the Book of Proverbs: Length of

days is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honour'

These and similar gifts may or may not follow our choice of divine

wisdom as our truest good If we have really chosen it, we shall regard

them as make-weights, to be thankfully received and rightly used, but

not as indispensable. If we pursue wisdom for the sake of getting

these, we shall lose both it and them. If we have set our desires most

earnestly on the most worthy things, which are God's love and a

character hallowed by His grace, we shall be rich indeed, whether what

the world calls wealth be ours or no; and our days will be long enough

if in them we have been prepared for the fuller wisdom and undying life

of heaven.

Solomon realised his youthful aspirations. The only way to be sure of

getting what we wish, is to wish what God desires to give,--even

Himself,--and to ask it of Him. Solomon, like many a young man, outgrew

his early dream.' Was he happier or wiser when he was a worn-out

voluptuary, smiling with cynical scorn at his young self, or when, with

generous enthusiasm, he felt the solemnity of life and the awfulness of

duty, and asked God to help his insufficiency? Was not the dream truer

and more real than the waking hours of profligacy and unreal

enjoyment'?

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THE GREAT GAIN OF GODLINESS

And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under

his fig tree, from Dan even to Beer-sheba, all the days of Solomon. 26.

And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and

twelve thousand horsemen. 27. And those officers provided victual for

king Solomon, and for all that came unto king Solomon's table, every

man in his month: they lacked nothing. 28. Barley also and straw for

the horses and dromedaries brought they unto the place where the

officers were, every man according to his charge. 29. And God gave

Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of

heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. 30. And Solomon's

wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and

all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan

the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and

his fame was in all nations round about. 32. And he spake three

thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five. 33. And he

spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the

hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of

fowl and of creeping things, and of fishes. 34. And there came of all

people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth,

which had heard of his wisdom.'--1 KINGS iv. 25-34.

The glories of Solomon's reign kindle the writer of this Book of Kings

to patriotic enthusiasm, all the more touching if, as is probable, he

wrote during Israel's exile. The fair vision of the past would make the

sad present still sadder. But it is not patriotism only which guides

his pen; he recognises that Solomon's glory was the result of Solomon's

religion, and by portraying it he would teach the eternal truth that

godliness hath promise of the life that now is' as well as of that

which is to come.' The passage brings out three characteristics of

Solomon's reign and character: the peace enjoyed by Israel during his

time, his wealth, and his wisdom.

I. That beautiful phrase for a time of secure enjoyment of modest,

material good in a simple state of agricultural society, dwelt safely,

every man under his vine and under his fig tree' occurs frequently in

the Old Testament, and breathes the very essence of a calm life of

rural felicity and restful enjoyment of wholesome joys. How different

from the feverish ideal predominant in our great cities to-day! Which

is the nobler and the more likely to yield abiding content and to be

the ally of high and serious thought--this antique picture of

leisurely, unambitious lives, or the scramble for wealth which destroys

repose, and is so busy getting that it has no time either rightly to

enjoy, or nobly to expend, its wealth? Those who have their country's

truest prosperity at heart may well sigh for the return of the vanished

ideal of Solomon's days; and those who would make the most of

themselves must in some measure seek to conform their own lives to it.

But another view may be taken of this picture of national prosperity.

Remember the time at which it was painted,--a time when the prosperity

of a nation was thought to consist in conquest, and when the arts of

peace were despised. How far beyond his era was the king who set his

highest glory in securing for his people tranquil lives on their

fertile homesteads, and condemned the vulgar glory of the conqueror!

How far beyond his era was the writer who felt that the fairest page in

his book was not that which told of battles and triumphs, but that

which portrayed a peaceful reign, when swords were turned into

ploughshares! The world has not yet learned that the highest function

of government is to promote individual prosperity. The vulgar, wicked

notion of glory' bewitches the nations still. A Europe, armed to the

teeth and staggering under the weight of its weapons, has need to go to

school to this old Hebrew ideal. They didn't know everything down in

Judee,' but they knew that peace has nobler victories than war has. The

people who see nothing in the world's history but natural evolution

have a hard nut to crack in accounting for the singular fact that the

Jew somehow or other had got hold of a truth to which the most advanced

nations to-day have scarcely grown up.

II. The wealth of Solomon is illustrated by his large equipment of

chariots and horsemen. The older habits of the nation had not favoured

the use of either, and their employment by Solomon was a sign of

growing luxury, which had the seeds of evil in it. But the novelty was

characteristic of the change coming over Israel in his day, and of its

closer intercourse with other nations. The number of forty thousand for

the stalls of the horses is an evident clerical error, which is

corrected in the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles ix. 25 to the more

probable number of four thousand. A well-organised staff looked after

provisioning the cavalry and chariot horses wherever they were

quartered. This one instance of Solomon's resources should be connected

with the other details of these. The intention of all is, not only to

magnify his wealth, but to bring out the fulfilment of the promise made

to him as part of the reward of his prayer for wisdom, that he should

have the inferior good which he had not asked, both riches and honour.'

The principle which the writer of this book would confirm and exemplify

is, that to the man who seeks first the kingdom of God and His

righteousness all these things shall be added. Now the whole order of

supernatural providences in the Old Testament was directed to making

material prosperity depend on obedience to God. And we cannot assert

that the New Testament order has the same purpose in view. Prosperity

was the blessing of the Old Testament; adversity is the blessing of the

New.' But even in Old Testament times outward prosperity did not always

follow godliness, and the problem which has tortured all generations

had already been raised, as the Book of Job and Psalm lxxiii show.

Undoubtedly, religion does contribute to prosperity. The natural

tendency of the course of life which Christianity enjoins is to lead to

moderate, modest success in a worldly point of view. Not many

millionaires owe their millions to the practice of Christian virtues,

but many a man owes his elevation from poverty to modest competence to

the character and habits which his religion has stamped on him. People

who get converted in the slums soon get out of the slums.

But, whether Christianity helps a man to worldly success or not, it

helps him to get all the good out of the world that the world can give.

It may, or may not, give dainties, but it will make brown bread sweet.

It may, or may not, give wealth, but it will make the little that a

righteous man hath better than the riches of many wicked.' They who

know no higher good than earth can yield know not the highest good of

earth; they who put worldly prosperity and treasure second find them

far more precious and sweet than when they ranked them as first.

III. But the crown of Solomon's gifts was his wisdom. And his elevation

of intellectual and moral endowments above material good is as

remarkable as his similar elevation of peace above warlike fame, and

suggests the same questions as to the source of ideas so far ahead of

what was then the world's point of view. Observe that Solomon's wisdom'

in all its departments is traced to God its giver. Observe, too, that

expression largeness of heart,' by which is meant, not width of quick

sympathy or generosity, but what we should call comprehensive

intellect. The heart' is the centre of the personal being, from which

thoughts as well as affections flow, and the phrase here points to

thoughts rather than to affections.

Solomon, then, was a many-sided student, and his genius' showed itself

in very various forms. He lived before the days of specialists. The

region of knowledge was so limited that a man could be master in many

departments. Nowadays the mass has become so unmanageable that, to know

one subject thoroughly, we have to be ignorant of many, like the

scholar who had given his life to the study of the Greek noun, and,

dying, lamented that he had not confined himself to the dative case!

Practical wisdom, which had its field In doing justice between his

subjects; shrewd observation of life, with wit to discern resemblances

and to put wisdom into homely, short sayings; poetic sensibility and

the gift of melodious speech; and, added to these manifold endowments,

interest in, and rudimentary knowledge of, natural history and botany,

make the points specified as Solomon's wisdom.

A man so various that he seemed to be

Not one, but all mankind's epitome,'--

the first and greatest of the few students or philosophers who have sat

on thrones.

But the main thing to notice is that in Solomon we see exemplified the

normal relation between religion and intellectual power and learning.

Judge, artist, scientist, and all other thinkers and students, draw

their power from God, and should use it for Him. And, on the other

hand, Solomon's example is a rebuke to those narrow-minded Christians

who look askance at men of learning, letters, or science, as well as to

those still more narrow-minded men of intellectual ability who think

that science and religion must be sworn foes. If our religion is what

it should be, it will widen our understanding all round.

Let knowledge grow from more to more, But more of reverence in us

dwell.'

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GREAT PREPARATIONS FOR A GREAT WORK

And Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants unto Solomon; for he had heard

that they had anointed him king in the room of his father: for Hiram

was ever a lover of David. 2. And Solomon sent to Hiram, saying, 3.

Thou knowest how that David my father could not build an house unto the

name of the Lord his God for the wars which were about him on every

side, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. 4. But now

the Lord my God hath given me rest on every side, so that there is

neither adversary nor evil occurrent. 6. And, behold, I purpose to

build an house unto the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spake unto

David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in

thy room, he shall build an house unto My name. 6. Now therefore

command thou that they hew me cedar trees out of Lebanon; and my

servants shall be with thy servants: and unto thee will I give hire for

thy servants according to all that thou shalt appoint: for thou knowest

that there is not among us any that can skill to hew timber like unto

the Sidonians. 7. And. it came to pass, when Hiram heard the words of

Solomon, that he rejoiced greatly, and said, Blessed be the Lord this

day, which hath given unto David a wise son over this great people. 8.

And Hiram sent to Solomon, saying, I have considered the things which

thou sentest to me for: and I will do all thy desire concerning timber

of cedar, and concerning timber of fir. 9. My servants shall bring them

down from Lebanon unto the sea: and I will convey them by sea in floats

unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be

discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt

accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household. 10. So Hiram

gave Solomon cedar trees, and fir trees, according to all his desire.

11. And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat, for food

to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to

Hiram year by year. 12. And the Lord gave Solomon wisdom, as He

promised him: and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon; and they

two made a league together.'--1 KINGS v. 1-12.

The building of the Temple was begun in the fourth year of Solomon's

reign (1 Kings vi. 1). The preparations for so great a work must have

taken much time, so that the arrangement with Hiram recorded in this

passage was probably made very early in the reign. That probability is

strengthened if we suppose, as we must do, that the embassy from Hiram

mentioned in verse I was sent to congratulate Solomon on his accession.

If so, the latter's proposal to get timber and stones from the Lebanon

would be made at the very commencement of the reign. Three years would

not be more than enough to get the material ready and transported.

Great designs need long preparation. Raw haste wastes time;

deliberation is as needful before beginning as rapid action is when we

have begun.

I. Verses 3-5 set forth very forcibly the motives which impelled the

young king to the work, and may suggest to us the motives which should

urge us to diligence in building a better temple than he reared. He

begins by reference to his father's foiled wish, and to the reason why

David could not build the house. Not only was it inappropriate that a

warlike king should build it, but it was impossible that, whilst his

thoughts were occupied and his resources taxed by war, he should devote

himself to such a work. In Assyria and Egypt the great warrior kings

are the great temple-builders, but a divine decorum forbade it to be so

in Israel.

Solomon next thankfully describes his own happier circumstances.

Observe his designation of Jehovah in verse 4 as my God,' and compare

with verse 3, where He is called David's God. The son had inherited the

divine protection and the father's sense of personal relation to

Jehovah. That is a better legacy than a throne. Well had it been for

Solomon if he had held by the faith of his first days of royalty! Such

a sense of a personal bond of love protecting on the one hand, and love

trusting and obeying on the other, is the spring of all true service of

God, whether it is busied in temple-building or in anything else.

We note also the grateful recognition of benefits received, and the

tracing of peace and outward prosperity to God's care. There was not a

cloud in the sky. The horizon was clear all round, and it was the Lord

my God,' who had made this ease for Solomon. We are often more ready to

recognise God's hand in sorrows than in joys. When He smites, we try to

say It is the Lord!' Do we try to say it when all things are smooth and

bright?

The effect of blessings should be thankfulness, and the proof of

thankfulness is service. So Solomon did not take prosperity as an

inducement to selfish luxurious repose, but heard in it God's call to a

great task. If all the rich men and all the leisurely women who call

themselves Christians would do likewise, there would be plenty of

workers and of resources for Christ's service, which now sorely lacks

both. How many of such lay up treasure for themselves, and are not rich

toward God'! How many fritter away their leisure in vanities, having

time for any amusement or folly, but none for Christian service!

The man whom Jesus called Thou fool!' not the wise king, is the pattern

for a sad number of professing Christians. Thou hast much goods laid up

for many years.' What then? I purpose to build an house for the name of

the Lord'? By no means. I will build greater barns, and that will give

me something to do, and then I will take mine ease.'

We note, too, that Solomon was impelled to his great work by the

knowledge that God had appointed him to do it. The divine word

concerning himself, spoken to his father, sounded in his ears, and gave

him no rest till he had set about obeying it (v. 5). The motives of the

great temple-builders of old, as they themselves expound them in

hieroglyphics and cuneiform, were largely ostentation and the wish to

outdo predecessors; but Solomon was moved by thankfulness and by

obedience to his father's will, and still more, to God's destination of

him. If we would look at our positions and blessings as he looked at

his in the fair dawning of his reign, we should find abundant

indications of God's will regarding our work.

Solomon uses a remarkable expression as to the purpose of the Temple.

It is to be an house for the name of the Lord.' That is not the same as

for the Lord.' Pagan temples might be intended by their builders for

the actual residence of the god, but Solomon knew that the heaven of

heavens could not contain Him, much less this house which he was about

to build. We are fairly entitled, then, to lay stress on that phrase,

the Name.' It means the whole self-revelation of God, or, rather, the

character of God as made known by that self-revelation.

The Temple was, then, to be the place in which the God who fills earth

and heaven was to manifest Himself, and where His servants were to

behold and reverence Him as manifested. The Shechinah was the symbol,

and in one aspect was a part, of that self-revelation. However, in

common speech the Temple was spoken of as the house of Jehovah. The

same thought which is expressed in Solomon's fuller phrase underlay the

expression,--He dwelt not in temples made with hands' but His name was

set there, and the structure was reared, not so much for Him as that

worshippers might there meet Him.

II. The rest of the passage deals with Solomon's request to Hiram, and

the preparation of the material for the Temple. Solomon's first care

was to secure timber and stone. His own dominions can never have been

well wooded, and there are many indications that the great central knot

of mountainous land, which included the greater part of his kingdom,

was comparatively treeless. He therefore proposed to Hiram to supply

timber from the great woods on Lebanon, which have now nearly died out,

and offered liberal payment.

The parallel account in 2 Chronicles makes Solomon offer specified

quantities of provisions for Hiram's workmen, and makes Hiram accept

the terms. Verse 11 of this chapter says that the provisions named

there were for the Tyrian king's household.' This may possibly mean the

workmen, who would be regarded as Hiram's slaves, but, more probably,

household' means court,' and Solomon had not only to feed the army of

workmen, but to supply as much again for the great establishment which

Hiram kept up. The little slip of seacoast, with the mountain rising

sharply behind, which made Hiram's kingdom, could not grow enough for

his people's wants. His country was nourished' by Palestine, long

centuries after this time (Acts xii. 20), and the same was the case in

Solomon's period. In verse 11, the quantity of oil is impossibly small

as compared with that of wheat. 2 Chronicles reads twenty thousand'

instead of twenty,' and the Septuagint inserts thousand' in verse 11,

which is probably correct.

With all his Oriental politeness and probably real wish to oblige a

powerful neighbour, Hiram was too true a Phoenician not to drive a good

bargain. He was king of a nation of shopkeepers,' and was quite worthy

of the position. Nothing for nothing' seems to have been his motto,

even with friends. He would love Solomon, and send him flowery

congratulations, and talk as if all he had was his ally's, but when it

came to settling terms he knew what his cedars were worth, and meant to

have their value.

There are a good many people who get mixed up with religious work, and

talk as if it were very near their hearts, who have as sharp an eye to

their own advantage as he had. The man who serves God because he gets

paid for it, does not serve Him. The Temple may be built of the timber

and stones that he has supplied, but he sold them, and did not give

them, therefore he has no part in the building.

How different the uncalculating lavishness of Solomon! He knows no

better use for treasures than to expend them on God's service, and all

for love, and nothing for reward.' That Is the true temper for

Christian work. He to whom Christ has given Himself should give himself

to Christ; and he who has given himself should and will keep back

nothing, nor seek for cheap ways of serving the Lord, He who gives all,

be it two mites, or a fishing-boat and some torn nets, or great wealth

like that which Solomon found in his father's treasuries and devoted to

building the Temple, gives much; and he who gives less than he can

gives little.

Solomon's work was, after all, outward work, and fitter for that early

age than the imitation of it would be now. The days for building

temples and cathedrals are past. The universal religion hallows not

Gerizim nor Jerusalem, but every place where souls seek God The

spiritual religion asks for no shrines reared by men's hands; for Jesus

Christ is the true Temple, where God's name is set, and where men may

behold the manifested Jehovah, and meet with Him. But we have work to

do for Christ, and a temple to build in our own souls, and a stone or

two to lay in the great Temple which is being built up through the

ages. Well for us if we use our resources and our leisure, for such

ends with the same promptitude, thankful surrender, and sense of

fulfilling God's purpose, as animated the young king of Israel!

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BUILDING IN SILENCE

. . . There was neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of Iron heard In

the house, while it was in building.'--1 KINGS vi. 7.

The Temple was built in silence. It rose like an exhalation.'

No hammer fell, no ponderous axes rung, Like some tall palm the mystic

fabric sprung.'

Perhaps it was merely for convenience of transport and to save time

that the stones were dressed in the quarries, but more probably the

silence was due to an instinct of reverence. We may fairly use it as

suggesting two thoughts.

I. How God's house is mostly built in silence. The Kingdom of God

cometh not with observation.'

(1) In reference to its advance in the world. Destructive work is

noisy, constructive work is silent. God was in the still small voice,'

not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire. Christ's own career, how

silent it was! Drums are loud and empty. The spread of the kingdom was

unnoticed by the world's great ones--Caesars, philosophers, patricians,

and it silently grew underground. Hence may flow--

(a) An encouragement to those whose work is inconspicuous.

(b) A lesson not to mistake noise and notoriety for spiritual progress.

(c) Guidance as to our expectations of the advance of Christ's kingdom.

It will transform society by slow, often unnoticed, degrees, by radical

change of individuals' habits. The elevation of humanity will be slow,

like the imperceptible rise of the Norwegian coast. Sudden changes are

short-lived changes. Lightly come, lightly go.' What matures slowly

will last long.

(2) In reference to its growth in our souls.

Silence is needed for that. There must be much still communion and

quiet reflection. The advance in the Christian life is variously

likened to a battle, since there are antagonists and struggle is needed

to overcome; and to vegetable or corporeal growth, which the mysterious

indwelling life works without effort and almost without consciousness,

but it is also likened to the erection of a building, in which there is

continuity, and each successive course of masonry is the foundation for

that above it. That work of building is work that must be done in

silence. If we are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus, we must

silently drink in the sunshine and dew, and so prosperously pass from

blade to ear, and thence to full corn in the ear.

Surely nothing is more needed in these days of noisy advertisement, and

measurement of the importance of things by the noise that they can

make, than this lesson of the place of silence in Christian progress,

both for individuals and for the Christian Church as a whole.

II. How God's house is built of prepared stones.

That is true, in one view of the matter, in regard to the Church on

earth, for there must be the individual act of repentance and faith

before a soul is fit to be built into the fabric of the Church.

There is providential training of men for their tasks before these are

given to them.

But the highest application of the symbol which we venture to find in

our text is to the relation between the earthly and the heavenly life.

This world is the quarry where the stones are dressed for the Temple in

the heavens.

(a) Life is the chipping and hewing. The unnecessary pieces are struck

off with heavy mallet and sharp chisel. Pain and sorrow are thus

explained, if not wholly, yet sufficiently to bring about submission

and trust.

(b) The Builder has His plan clearly before Him, and works accurately

to realise it. He perfectly knows what He means to build, and every

stroke of the dressing-tool is accurately directed. There are no

mistakes made in His quarrying.

(c) We may be sure that the prepared stones will be brought to the

Temple site and built into it. There lie gigantic half-hewn pillars in

abandoned quarries in Syria and Egypt. But no one will ever say of the

divine Temple-Builder: He began to build and was not able to finish. It

remains a problem how the old builders managed to transport these huge

stones from the quarries to the site, but we may be sure that the

Architect of the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,'

knows how to bring every stone that has been prepared here, to the

place prepared for it, and for which it has been prepared. We may

repose on the Apostle's assurance that He that has begun a good work in

you will perform it,' or rather on the more sure word of Jesus Himself,

He that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.'

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THE KING BLESSING' HIS PEOPLE

And it was so, that when Solomon had made an end of praying all this

prayer and supplication unto the Lord, he arose from before the altar

of the Lord, from kneeling on his knees with his hands spread up to

heaven. 55. And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel

with a loud voice, saying, 56. Blessed be the Lord, that hath given

rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there

hath not failed one word of all His good promise, which He promised by

the hand of Moses His servant. 57. The Lord our God be with us, as He

was with our fathers: let Him not leave us, nor forsake us: 58. That He

may incline our hearts unto Him, to walk in all His ways, and to keep

His commandments, and His statutes, and His judgments, which He

commanded our fathers. 59. And let these my words, wherewith I have

made supplication before the Lord, be nigh unto the Lord our God day

and night, that He maintain the cause of His servant, and the cause of

His people Israel at all times, as the matter shall require: 60. That

all the people of the earth may know that the Lord is God, and that

there is none else. 61. Let your heart therefore be perfect with the

Lord our God, to walk in His statutes, and to keep His commandments, as

at this day. 62. And the king, and all Israel with him, offered

sacrifice before the Lord. 63. And Solomon offered a sacrifice of

peace-offerings, which he offered unto the Lord, two and twenty

thousand oxen, and an hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king

and all the children of Israel dedicated the house of the Lord.'--1

KINGS viii. 54-63.

The great ceremonial of dedicating the Temple was threefold. The first

stage was setting the ark in its place, which was the essence of the

whole thing. God's presence was the true dedication, and that was

manifested by the bright cloud that filled the sanctuary as soon as the

ark was placed there. The second stage was the lofty and spiritual

prayer, saturated with the language and tone of Deuteronomy, and

breathing the purest conceptions of the character and nature of God,

and all aglow with trust in Him. Then followed, thirdly, this Blessing

of the Congregation.' The prayer had been uttered by the kneeling king.

Now he stands up, and, with ringing tones that reach to the outskirts

of the crowd, he gathers the spirit of his prayer into two petitions,

preceded by praise for national blessings, and followed by exhortation

to national obedience. A huge sacrifice of unexampled magnitude closes

the whole.

I. Note the thankful retrospect of the nation's past (verse 56).

Solomon blessed the congregation' when, in their name, he lifted up his

voice to bless the Lord, prayed that God would incline their hearts to

keep His law, and would maintain their cause, and exhorted them to keep

their hearts perfect with Him. We bless each other when we ask God to

bless, and when we draw each other nearer Him. Standing there in the

new Temple, with a united nation gathered before him, the cloud filling

the house, and peace resting on all his land to its farthest border,

the king looks back on the long road from Sinai and the desert, and

sums up the whole history in one sentence. The end has vindicated the

methods. There had been many a dark time when enemies had oppressed,

and many a hard-fought field had been stained with Israel's blood; but

all had tended to this calm hour, when Israel's multitudes were

gathered in worship, and their unguarded homes were safe. There had

been many heroes in the long line.

Time would fail' him to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah; of

David and Samuel . . . who . . . turned to flight armies of aliens.'

One name alone is worthy to be named,--the name of the true Deliverer

and Monarch. It is the Lord who hath given rest unto His people.' We

look on the past most wisely when we see in it all the working of one

mighty Hand, and pass beyond the great names of history or the dear

names which have made the light of our homes, to the ever-living God,

who works through changing instruments; and the help that is done on

earth, He doeth it Himself.' We read the past most truly when we see in

all its vicissitudes God's unchanging faithfulness, and recognise that

the foes and sorrows which often pressed sore upon us were no breach of

His faithful promises, but either His loving chastisement for our

faithlessness, or His loving discipline meant to perfect our

characters. We read the past best from the vantage-ground of the

Temple. From its height we understand the lie of the land. Communion

with God explains much which is else inexplicable. Solomon's judgment

of Israel's checkered history will be our judgment of our own when we

stand in the higher courts of the heavenly home, and look from that

height upon all the way by which the Lord our God hath led us. In the

meantime, it is often a trial for faith to repeat these words; but the

blessing that comes from believing them true is worth the effort to

stifle our tears in order to say them.

II. Note the prayer for obedient hearts (verses 57, 58). The proper

subject-matter of this petition is that He may incline our hearts to

walk in His ways,' and God's presence is invoked as a means thereto.

The deepest desire of a truly religious soul is for the felt nearness

of God. That goes before all other blessings, and contains them all.

Nothing is so needful or so sweet as that The presence of God is the

absence of evil, the evil both of pain and of sin, as surely as the

rising sun is the routing of night's black hosts. The best of all is,

God is with us.' The prayer again looks back to the past, and asks that

the ancient experiences may be renewed. The generations of those who

trust in God are knit together, and the wonders of old time are capable

of repetition to-day. Faith can say with deeper meaning than the

Preacher, That which hath been is that which shall be.' However varying

may be the forms, the fact of a divine presence and help according to

need is invariable, and they that have gone before have not exhausted

the fountain, which will fill the vessel of the latest comer as it did

that of the first. How beautifully the abiding God and the fleeting

series of our fathers' is contrasted! A moment of triumph, when some

work, like that of building the Temple, which has for ages been looked

forward to, and into which the sacrifices and aspirations of a long

line of dead toilers are built, brings strongly before all thoughtful

men the continuity of a nation or a Church, and the transiency of its

individual members. It should suggest the abiding God yet more strongly

than it does the passing fathers. The mercy remains the same, while the

receivers change. The sunshine and the tree are the same, though the

leaves which glisten and grow in the light have but one summer to live.

But Solomon desires that God may be with him and his people for one

specific purpose. Is it to bring outward prosperity, or to extend their

territory, or to give them victory? As in his choice in his dream, so

now, he asks, not for these things, but for an inward influence on

heart and will. What he wants most for himself and them is moral

conformity to God's will. All must be right if that be right. The

prayer implies that, without God's help, the heart will wander from the

paths of duty. The weakness of human nature, and the consequent

necessity for God's grace in order to obedience, were as deeply felt by

the devout men of the Old Testament as by Apostles. They are felt by

every man who has honestly tried to measure the sweep and inwardness of

God's law, and to realise it in life. We need go but a very short way

on the road to discover that temptations to diverge lie so thick on

either side, and that our feet grow weary so soon, that we shall make

but little progress without help from above.

The synonyms for the law are worthy of notice. Why are there so many of

these in the Old Testament? For the same reason that there are so many

for money' in English,--because those who made the language thought so

much about the thing, and delighted in it so much. As commandments,' it

was solemnly imposed by rightful authority, and obedience was

obligatory. The word rendered statutes' means something engraved, or

written, and recalls the tables inscribed by God's finger. Judgments'

are the divine decisions or sentences as to what is right, and

therefore the infallible clue to the else bewildering labyrinth. To

obey these commandments, to read that solemn writing, and to accept

these decisions as our guides, is man's perfection and blessedness; and

for that God's felt presence is indispensable.

III. Note the prayer for God's defence (verses 59, 60). The proper

subject-matter of this petition is that God would maintain the cause of

king and nation; and it is preceded by a petition that, to that end,

the preceding prayer may be answered, and is followed by the desire

that thereby the knowledge of God may fill the earth. The prayer for

outward blessings comes after the prayer for inward heart-obedience. Is

not that the right order? Our prayers need to be prayed for, and a true

desire is not contented with one utterance. To ask that what we have

asked may be given is no vain repetition, nor a sign of weak faith, or

undue anxiety. How bold the figure in asking that the prayer may lie

before God day and night, like some suppliant at the foot of His

throne!

Note the grand aim of God's help of Israel,--the universal diffusion of

His name among all the peoples of the earth. Solomon understood the

divine vocation of Israel, and had risen above desiring blessings only

for his own or his subjects' sake. Later ages fell from that elevation

of feeling, and hugged their special privileges without a thought of

the obligations which they involved. God's choice of Israel was not

meant for the exclusion of the Gentiles, but as the means of

transmitting the knowledge of God to them. The one nation was chosen

that God's grace might fructify through it to all. The fire was

gathered into a hearth, that the whole house might be warmed. But

selfishness marred the divine plan, and Israel became a nonconductor,

and the privileges selfishly kept became corrupt; as the miser's corn

stored in his barns in famine breeds weevils. Christians need no more

solemn lesson of what comes from selfishly hoarding spiritual blessings

than the fate of Israel. God hath shined into our hearts, that we may

give to others who sit in the dark the light which we possess; and if

we fail to do so, the light will darken within us.

IV. The blessing ends with one brief, all-comprehensive charge to the

people, which seems based, by its therefore,' on the preceding thought

of Jehovah as the only God. The only attitude corresponding to His sole

and supreme Majesty is the entire devotion of heart, which leads to

thoroughgoing obedience to His commandments. The word rendered perfect'

literally means entire' or sound,' and here expresses the complete

devotion of the whole nature. Solomon meant that it should be complete,

in contradistinction to any sidelong glances to idolatry. The principle

underlying that therefore' is that, God being what He is, our only God

and refuge, the only adequate hope and object of our nature, we should

give our whole selves to Him. We, too, are tempted to bring Him divided

hearts, and to carry some of our love and trust as offerings at other

shrines. But if there be one God, and none other but He,' then to serve

Him with all our heart and strength and mind is the dictate of common

sense, and the only service which He can accept, or which can bring to

our else distracted natures peace and satisfaction. His voice to us is,

My son, give Me thy whole heart.' Our answer to Him should ever be that

prayer, Lord, . . . unite my heart to fear Thy name.' A divided heart

is misery. Partial trust is distrust. Love me all in all, or not at

all,' is the requirement of all deep, human love; and shall God ask

less than men and women ask from and give to one another?

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THE MATTER OF A DAY IN ITS DAY'

At all times, as the matter shall require.'--1 KINGS viii. 59.

I have ventured to diverge from my usual custom, and take this fragment

of a text because, in the forcible language of the original, it carries

some very important lessons. The margin of our Bible gives the literal

reading of the Hebrew; the sense, but not the vigorous idiom, of which

is conveyed in the paraphrase in our version. At all times, as the

matter shall require,' is, literally, the thing of a day in its day';

and that is the only limitation which this prayer of Solomon places

upon the petition that God would maintain the cause of His servants and

of His people Israel. The kingly suppliant got a glimpse of very great,

though very familiar, truths, and at that hour of spiritual

illumination, the very high-water mark of his relations to God--for I

suppose he was never half as good a man afterwards--he gave utterance

to the great thought that God's mercies come to us day by day,

according to the exigencies of the moment.

Now, I think that in the words the matter of a day in its day' we may

see both a principle in reference to God's gifts and a precept in

reference to our actions. Let us look at these two things.

I. A principle in reference to God's gifts.

Of course, obviously--and I need not say more than a word about that--

we find it so in regard to the outward blessings that are poured into

our lives. We are taught, if the translation of the New Testament is

correct, to ask, Give us this day our daily bread,' and to let

to-morrow alone. Life comes to us pulsation by pulsation, breath by

breath, by reason of the continual operation, in the material world, of

the present God's present giving. He does not start us, at the

beginning of our days, with a fund of physical vitality upon which we

thereafter draw, but moment by moment He opens His hand, and lets life

and breath and all things flow out to us moment by moment, for no

creature would live for an instant except for the present working of a

present God. If we only realised how the slow pulsation of the minutes

is due to the touch of His finger on the pendulum, and how everything

that we have, and the existence of us who have it, are results of the

continuous welling out from the fountain of life, of ripple after

ripple of the waters, everything would be more sacred, and more solemn,

and fuller of God than, alas! it is.

But the true region in which we may best find illustrations of this

principle in reference to God's gifts is the region of the spiritual

and moral bestowments which He in His love pours upon us. He does not

flood us with them: He filters them drop by drop, for great and good

reasons. I only mention three various forms of this one great thought.

God gives us gifts adapted to the moment. The matter of a day,' the

thing fitted for the instant, comes. In deepest reality, all is one

gift, for in truth what God gives to us is Himself; or, if you like to

put it so, His grace. That little word grace' is like a small window

that opens out on to a great landscape, for it gathers up into one

encyclopaediacal expression the whole infinite variety of beneficences

and bestowments which come showering down upon us. That one gift is, as

the Apostle puts it in one of his eloquent epithets, the manifold grace

of God,' which word in the original is even more rich and picturesque,

because it means the many-variegated' grace--like some rich piece of

embroidery glowing with all manner of dyes and gold. So the one gift

comes to us manifold, rich in its adaptation to, and its exquisite

fitness for, the needs of the moment. The Rabbis had a tradition that

the manna in the wilderness tasted to every man just what each man

needed or wished most. It Is as though in some imperial city on a day

of rejoicing, one found a fountain in the market-place pouring out,

according to the wish of the people, various costly wines and

refreshing drinks, God's gift comes to us with like variety--the matter

of a day in its day.'

God never gives us the wrong medicine. In whatever variety of

circumstances we stand, that one infinitely simple and yet infinitely

complex gift contains what we specially want at the moment. Am I

struggling? He extends a hand to steady me. Am I fighting? He is my

sword and shield, my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high

tower.' Am I anxious? He comes into my heart, and brings with Him a

great peace, and all waves cease to toss and smooth themselves into a

level plain. Am I glad? He comes to heighten the gladness by some touch

of holier joy. Am I perplexed in mind? If I look to Him, His coming

shall be as the morning,' and illumination will be granted. Am I

treading a lonely path? There is One by my side who will neither

change, nor fail, nor die. Whatever any man needs, at the moment that

he needs it, that one great Gift will supply the matter of a day in its

day.'

God gives punctually. Many of us may have sometimes sent Christmas

presents to India or Australia some weeks before. Some will arrive in

time and some will be too late. God's gifts never reach us before the

day, and they never come after the day. The Lord shall help her, and

that right early,' said the grand psalm. What the Psalmist was thinking

about was, I suppose, that miraculous intervention when the army of

Sennacherib was smitten in a night. Timid and faithless souls in

Jerusalem, as they looked over the walls and saw the encircling lines

of the fierce foes drawing closer and closer round the doomed city,

must have said, Our Lord delayeth His coming,' and could not stand the

test of their faith and patience, involved in God's apparent

indifference to the need of His people. To-morrow the assault is to be

delivered. To-night

The Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,

And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed';

and the would-be assailants, when that to-morrow dawned, were lying

stiff and stark in their tents. God's help comes, not too soon, lest we

should not know the blessedness of trusting in the dark; and not too

late, lest we should know the misery of trusting in vain.

Peter is lying in prison. Herod intends, after the Passover, to bring

him out to the people. The scaffolding is ready. The first watch of the

night passes, and the second. If once it is fairly light, escape is

impossible. But in the grey dawn the angel touches the sleeper. He

wakes while his guards sleep. There is no need for hurry. He who has

God for his Deliverer has no occasion to go out with haste.' So, with

strange and majestic leisureliness, the escaping prisoner is bid to put

on his shoes and gird himself. No doubt, he cast many a scrutinising

glance at the four sleeping legionaries whom a heedless movement might

have wakened. When all is ready, he is led forth through all the wards,

each being a separate peril, and all made safe to him. The first gate

opens, and the second gate opens, and the iron gate that leads into the

city opens, and quietly he and the angel go down the street. It is

light enough for him to see his way to the house where the brethren are

assembled. He gets safe behind Mary's door before it is light enough

for the gaolers to discover his absence, and for the pursuers to be

started in their search. The Lord did help him, and that right early--

the matter of a day in its day.'

We shall find, if we leave our times in His hand, that the old simple

faith has still a talismanic power to quiet us. His time is best, so be

patient, and be trustful in your patience.

Again, God gives gifts enough, and not more than enough. He serves out

our rations for spirit as for body, as they do on shipboard, where the

sailors have to take their pots and plates to the galley every day and

for each meal, and get enough to help them over the moment's hunger.

The manna fell morning by morning. He that gathered much had nothing

over, he that gathered little had no lack.' So all the variety of our

changeful conditions, besides its purpose of disciplining ourselves and

of making character, has also the purpose of affording a theatre for

the display, if I may use such cold language--or rather let me say

affording an opportunity for the bestowment--of the infinitely varied,

exquisitely adapted, punctual, and sufficient grace of God.

II. But now, secondly, a word about the text as containing a precept

for our action.

Let me put what I have to say in three plain sentences.

First, take short views of the future. Of course, we have to look

ahead, and in reference to many things to take prudent forecasts, but

how many of us there are who weaken ourselves and spoil to-day by being

over-exquisite to cast the fashion of uncertain evils'! It is a great

piece of practical philosophy, and I am sure that it has much to do

with our getting the best out of the present moment, that we should

either take very short or very long views of the future. Either

Let the unknown to-morrow

Bring with it what it may,'

or look beyond the last of the days into the unseen light of an

unsetting sun. If I must anticipate, let me anticipate the ultimate,

the changeless, the certain; and let me not condemn my faculty of

picturing that which is to come, to look along the low ranges of

earthly life, and torture myself by imagining all the possibilities of

evil of which my condition admits, as being turned into certainties

to-morrow. Take the matter of a day in its day.' Sufficient unto the

day is the evil thereof.' Let us make the minute what it ought to be,

then God will make the whole what it ought to be.

Again I say, let us fill each day with discharged duties. If you and I

do not do the matter of the day in its day, the chances are that no

to-morrow will afford an opportunity of doing it. So there will come

upon us all, if we are unfaithful to this portioning out of tasks to

times, that burden of an irrevocable past, and of the omitted duties

that will stand reproving and condemning before us, whensoever we turn

our eyes to them. It might have been, and it is not'; does a sadder

speech than that fall from human lips? Brethren, the day, though it is

short, is elastic; and no one knows how much of discharged service and

accomplished work and fulfilled responsibilities can be crammed into

its hours, until he has earnestly tried to fill each moment with the

task which belongs to the moment. The sluggard will not plough by

reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest and have

nothing.' If our day is not filled full of work, some to-morrow will be

filled full, in retrospect, of thorns and stings. Life is short; the

night cometh when no man can work.' I must work the works of Him that

sent me while it is day.'

Lastly, I would say, keep open a continual communion with God, that day

by day you may get what day by day you need. There are hosts of people

who call themselves, and, in some kind of surface way, are, Christian

people, who seem to think that they get all that they need of the grace

of God in a lump, at the beginning of their Christian career, and who

are living upon past communications and the memory of these, and are

forgetting that they can no more live and be nourished upon past gifts

of God's grace than upon the dinner that they ate this day last year.

We must hang continually upon Him, if we are continually to receive

from His hand. No past blessing will avail for present use.

Dear friends, the purpose of this principle, which I have been trying

to illustrate in God's way of dealing with us, is that we shall be

content to be continually dependent, and consciously as well as

continually dependent, upon Him. In the measure in which we keep our

hearts open for the perpetual influx of His grace, in that measure

shall we be ready for each day as it comes; for its trials and its

joys, for its possibilities and its duties.

This, too, must be remembered--that the days bolted together make

months; and the months, years; and the years, life; and that life as a

whole is a day'; and that there is a matter' of that day which can only

be done in its day. Oh that none of us may be the subjects of that sad

wail from a Saviour's heart and a Saviour's lips, which lamented, If

thou hadst known, at least, in this thy day, the things that belong to

thy peace; but now'--the night has come, and the darkness of the night,

and--they are hid from thine eyes!'

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PROMISES AND THREATENINGS

And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished the building of the

house of the Lord, and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which

he was pleased to do. 2. That the Lord appeared to Solomon the second

time, as He had appeared unto him at Gibeon. 3. And the Lord said unto

him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made

before Me: I have hallowed this house, which thou hast built, to put My

name there for ever; and Mine eyes and Mine heart shall be there

perpetually, 4. And if thou wilt walk before Me, as David thy father

walked, in integrity of heart, and in uprightness, to do according to

all that I have commanded thee, and wilt keep My statutes and My

judgments: 5. Then I will establish the throne of thy kingdom upon

Israel for ever, as I promised to David thy father, saying, There shall

not fail thee a man upon the throne of Israel. 6. But if ye shall at

all turn from following Me, ye or your children, and will not keep My

commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and

serve other gods, and worship them: 7. Then will I cut off Israel out

of the land which I have given them; and this house which I have

hallowed for My name, will I cast out of My sight; and Israel shall be

a proverb and a byword among all people: 8. And at this house, which is

high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss;

and they shall say, Why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and to

this house? 9. And they shall answer, Because they forsook the Lord

their God, who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt,

and have taken hold upon other gods, and have worshipped them, and

served them: therefore hath the Lord brought upon them all this

evil.'--1 KINGS ix. 1-9.

The successful end of a great work is often the beginning of a great

reaction. When the tension is slackened, the whole nature of the worker

is relaxed, and the temptation to slothful self-indulgence is strong.

God knows our frame, and mercifully times His manifestations to the

moments of special need. So, when Solomon had finished his great task,

the Lord appeared the second time, as He had appeared at Gibeon.' There

had been no manifest token of approval during all the years of building

the Temple, for none was needed; but now there was danger that the

finished work might be followed by languor and indifference, and

therefore once more God spoke words of stimulus, both promises and

warnings.

A solemn alternative is set before the king, both parts of which are

fitted to rouse his energy and inspire him to faithful obedience. The

same alternatives are presented to each of us. In verses 3-5 God

promises blessed results from clinging to Him and keeping His statutes;

in verses 6-9 He mercifully threatens the tragic issues of departure.

In applying these to ourselves we must remember that outward prosperity

was attached to a devout life more closely in Israel than it is now.

But, though the form of the blessings dependent on doing God's will

alters, the reality remains unaltered.

I. The promises to Solomon are preceded by the assurance that his

prayer had been heard. The answer corresponds very beautifully to the

petitions. God has put His name' in the Temple, as the descent of the

Glory to rest between the cherubim visibly showed, and thus has

fulfilled Solomon's petition; but the answer surpasses the prayer in

that the presence of the Name' is promised for ever.' Similarly, in

Psalm cxxxii., the answer to the petition Arise into Thy rest'

transcends the petition which it answers, and adds the same promise of

perpetuity, This is My rest for ever.' Again, Solomon had prayed, that

Thine eyes may be open towards this house,' and God answers with the

expanded promise that not His eyes only, but His heart shall be there

perpetually. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we

ask or think,' and He delights to surprise us with over-answers to our

prayers. We cannot widen our desires so far but that His gifts will

stretch beyond them on every side.

But the promise of perpetual dwelling in the Temple is conditional, as

appears in the latter part of God's answer, though no condition is

stated at first. The promises to Solomon individually are all

contingent. The all-important if' at the beginning of verse 4 governs

the whole. The divine eulogium on David, which introduces these

promises, suggests how mercifully God regards the imperfect lives of

His servants. That merciful interpretation of conduct is removed by a

whole universe from palliation of sin. It affords no ground for our

thinking little of our inconsistencies. David's crime was sternly

rebuked and sorely punished, but still his life, in its main drift and

outline, could be presented as a pattern, as being marked by integrity

of heart and uprightness. The moon shines like a disc of silver, though

its surface is pitted with extinct volcanoes.

We may note, too, the pregnant description in outline of the elements

of a devout life, as here enjoined on Solomon. The first requisite is

to walk before God; that is, to nourish a continual consciousness of

His presence, and to regulate all actions and thoughts under the

thrilling and purifying sense of being ever in the great Taskmaster's

eye.' Only we are not to think of Him as only a Taskmaster, but as a

loving Friend and Helper. A child is happy in its little work or play

when it knows that its father is looking on with sympathy. The sense of

God's eye being on us should make a sunshine in a shady place,' should

lighten labour and sweeten care. It is at the root of practical

obedience, as its place in this sequence shows; for there follow it, in

verse 4, integrity of heart and uprightness,' on which again follow

obedience to all God's commandments.

First must come the clear recognition of God's relation to us. That

recognition will influence our relation to Him, bending hearts to love

and wills to submit, and the whole inward being to cleave to Him.

Thence, and only thence, will issue in the life the streams of

practical obedience. It is vain to seek to produce righteous deeds

unless our hearts are right, and it is as vain to labour at making our

hearts right unless thoughts of what God is to us have purified them.

Morality is rooted in religion. On the other hand, no knowledge of the

truth about God is worth anything unless it touches the hidden man of

the heart, and then passes outward to mould conduct. Faith without

works is dead.' Correct theology and glowing emotions lack their

consummation if they do not impel to holy and God-pleasing living.

The reward promised in verse 5 is for Solomon alone. His throne is to

be established for ever.' The duration intended by that expression is

therefore not absolutely unlimited, but equivalent to during thy

lifetime.' Solomon could only affect himself by his obedience. The

continuance of the kingdom after him depended on his successors. His

possession of the throne during his life was the beginning of the

fulfilment of the promise to David referred to in verse 5, but it was

only the beginning, and, like all God's promises, it was contingent on

obedience. We receive no outward kingdom if we are servants of God;

but, in deepest truth, the righteous man is a king, lord of himself,

though not of lands.' All creatures serve the soul that serves God, and

all Christ's brethren share in His royalty.

II. The second part of this divine utterance is addressed to the whole

nation, as is marked by the ye' there compared with the thou' in verse

4, and it lays down for succeeding generations the conditions on which

the new Temple, that stood glittering in the bright Eastern sunshine,

should retain its pristine beauty. While the address to Solomon incited

to obedience by painting its blessed consequences, that to the nation

reaches the same end by the opposite path of darkly portraying the ruin

that would be caused by departure from God. God draws by holding out a

hand full of good things, and He no less lovingly drives by stretching

out a hand armed with lightnings.

A plain declaration of the evils that dog disobedience is as loving as

a bright vision of the good that attends on submission. The sternest

threatenings of Scripture are spoken that they may never need to be

executed. There is no more foolish misconception of Christianity than

that which calls it harsh because it reveals that the wages of sin is

death.' Note that the threatenings come second, not first. God's heart

is averse to smite. To lavish blessing is His delight, and judgment is

His work, His strange work,' forced on Him by sin.

The special sin against which Israel was warned was that to which it

was specially prone and tempted by its circumstances. When all the

nations worshipped stocks and stones,' it was hard to keep thy faith so

pure' as to have no share in the universal bewitchment. So the whole

history of the people is one of lapses into idolatry and of

chastisements leading to temporary amendment, until the long, sharp

lesson of the Captivity eradicated the disposition to be as the nations

around. No doubt, idolatry in its crudest forms is outgrown now in

Western lands, but sense still craves material embodiment of the

unseen, and still feels the pressure of the material and palpable.

Hence the earthward direction of so many lives. Asthmatical patients

often breathe more easily in the slums of a city than in pure mountain

air, and sense-bound men find difficulty in respiration on the heights

of a religion which minimises the appeal to sense.

The penalty attached to departure from God was the loss of the land.

Israel kept it on a tenure like that of some of our English nobility,

who hold their estates on condition of doing some service to the

sovereign. Of course, that connection between serving God and national

prosperity involved continual supernatural intervention, and cannot be

applied entirely to national prosperity now; but it still remains true

that moral and religious corruption saps the foundations of a people's

well-being, and, when carried far enough, destroys a people's

existence. The solemn threat of becoming a proverb and a byword' among

all peoples is quoted, apparently from Deuteronomy xxviii. 37, and has

been only too terribly fulfilled for weary centuries.

The promise in verse 3, that God's eyes and heart should be perpetually

on the Temple, has now the condition attached that Israel should cleave

to the Lord. Otherwise it will be cast out of His sight, and be a mark

for scorn and wonder. The vivid representation of a dialogue between

passers-by is quoted from Deuteronomy xxix. 24-26, where it is spoken

in reference to the nation. It carries the solemn thought that God's

name is made known among the heathen by the punishment of His

unfaithful people, not less really, and sometimes more strikingly, than

by the blessings bestowed on the obedient. If we will not magnify Him

by joyous service, by rewarding which, with good He can magnify

Himself, He will magnify Himself on us by retribution, the more severe

as our blessings have been the greater. The lightning-scathed tree,

standing white in the forest, witnesses to the power of the flash, as

its leafy sisters in their green beauty proclaim the energy of the

sunshine. Israel has, perhaps, been a more convincing witness for God,

in its homeless centuries, than ever it was when at rest in the good

land. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He also

spare not thee.'

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A ROYAL SEEKER AFTER WISDOM

And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the

name of the Lord, she came to prove him with hard questions. 2. And she

came to Jerusalem with a very great train, with camels that bare

spices, and very much gold, and precious stones: and when she was come

to Solomon, she communed with him of all that was in her heart. 3. And

Solomon told her all her questions: there was not any thing hid from

the king, which he told her not. 4. And when the queen of Sheba had

seen all Solomon's wisdom, and the house that he had built, 5. And the

meat of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance

of his ministers, and their apparel, and his cupbearers, and his ascent

by which he went up unto the house of the Lord; there was no more

spirit in her. 6. And she said to the king, It was a true report that I

heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom. 7. Howbeit I

believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and,

behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth

the fame which I heard. 8. Happy are thy men, happy are these thy

servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy

wisdom. 9. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighteth in thee, to

set thee on the throne of Israel: because the Lord loved Israel for

ever, therefore made He thee king, to do judgment and justice. 10. And

she gave the king an hundred and twenty talents of gold, and of spices

very great store, and precious stones: there came no more such

abundance of spices as these which the queen of Sheba gave to king

Solomon. 11. And the navy also of Hiram, that brought gold from Ophir,

brought in from Ophir great plenty of almug trees, and precious stones.

12. And the king made of the almug trees pillars for the house of the

Lord, and for the king's house, harps also and psalteries for singers:

there came no such almug trees, nor were seen unto this day. 13. And

king Solomon gave unto the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatsoever

she asked, besides that which Solomon gave her of his royal bounty. So

she turned and went to her own country, she and her servants.'--1 KINGS

x. 1-13.

We feel the breath of a new era in the accounts of Solomon's reign. One

most striking peculiarity is the friendly intercourse with the nations

around. The horizon has widened, and, instead of wars with Philistines

and Ammon, we have alliances with Egypt, Tyre, and, in the present

passage, with Sheba, a district of Southern Arabia. The expansion was

fruitful of both good and evil. It brought new ideas and much wealth;

but it brought, too, luxury and idolatry. Still Israel was meant to be

a light to lighten the Gentiles,' and in this picturesque story of the

wisdom-seeking queen, we have the true relation of Israel to the

nations in its purest form. The details of the narrative. Interesting

as they are, need not occupy us long.

The queen had heard the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the

Lord, by which seems to be meant his reputation of being gifted with

deep knowledge of the divine character as revealed to him. The

questions which occupy earnest souls in all lands and ages were

stirring in the heart of this woman-chief. The only way, in these old

days, to learn the wisdom of the wise, was to go to them. So the

streets of Jerusalem saw the strange sight of the long train which had

come toiling up from Arabia, laden with its characteristic produce,

gold and spices and precious stones, in the enumeration of which is

reflected the wonder of the beholders at the unaccustomed procession.

But better than all her wealth was the eager woman's thirst for truth.

Surely it is a very unworthy and unlikely explanation of her hard

questions' and purpose to suppose that she came only for a duel of

wit,--to pose Solomon with half-playful riddles. The journey was too

toilsome, the gifts too large, the accent of conviction in her

subsequent words too grave, for that. She was a seeker after truth, and

probably after God, and had known the torture of the eternal questions

which rise in the mind, and, once having risen, leave no rest till they

are answered.

So she came, though half incredulous, hoping to find some solution to

what was in her heart,' and as thirsty for the answer as her country's

sands for water. Only they who have known the pain of carrying such

questions, like a fire in their bones, can know the joy which she felt

when she found one to whom she could speak them. It is something of a

drop to pass from Solomon's wisdom to the list of the splendours of his

household, and the effect which these produced on the queen; but the

whole account of Solomon's reign is marked by the same naive blending

of wisdom and material wealth. In those days, outward prosperity was

the sign of divine favour. But even in those days they knew that wisdom

was better than rubies.' The two elements were both at their height in

Solomon's reign, and the lower of them finally got uppermost, and

wrecked him. Plain living and high thinking are better than wisdom,'

which lets itself down to make much of the meat of the table,' and a

retinue of servants in fine clothes. How many of us would listen much

more respectfully to wisdom, if it lived in a palace, than in dens and

caves of the earth'? The queen's words in verses 6 to 9 are graceful

with a woman's tact, and full of feeling. She confesses that she had

come half-doubting, even though she risked the journey, and fervently

avows how far fame had been unlike itself in this instance, and had

diminished, and not magnified. Then she envies the servants who wait on

him, because they are so near the fountain, and finally breaks into

praise of Solomon's God, whose love to Israel was shown in giving it

such a king. One does not know whether praise of God or compliments to

Solomon were most in her mind. The words scarcely sound as if she had

become a worshipper of God. He is to her but thy God.' But we may

believe that she carried away some seed which grew up. Then, with

munificent interchange of gifts, she and her train glide out of the

story, and we lose them in the dark. The account of the wealth brought

by Hiram's ships comes singularly in, breaking the narrative of the

queen. Its insertion seems to indicate some connection between the

fleet and her, and to suggest that Sheba and Ophir were near each other

(which would put Ethiopia, where some have located it, out of court),

and that she heard of Solomon through it.

The whole incident may be regarded as an illustration of the spirit

that should mark all seekers after truth, whether earthly or heavenly.

This queen had to win a victory over national prejudices, over the

disabilities of her sex, over the temptations of her station, to travel

far, and face dangers, and to incur great cost. It was surely no mere

playful errand on which she was bent. She was smitten with the sacred

impulse to follow knowledge like a sinking star.' Seldom, indeed, have

rulers made progresses from their dominions for such an end, and seldom

have two of them met to confer on such subjects. We shall not rightly

measure the relative importance of things unless we resolutely set

ourselves to look at them with eyes purged from the illusions of sense,

and cleared to see how much better than wealth and all outward good is

the possession of truth. All sacrifices made to win it are richly

repaid, and wise investments. Even in regard to lower kinds of truth,

to win them is worth the effort of a life; and, in regard to the

highest kind, which is the personal Truth, he is the wise man who

counts all earthly good but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of

it. This queen points the path by which all pilgrims of the truth must

travel. It is not to be won without effort, without conquest of

prejudices, repression of weakness, sacrifices of delights, and long

effort. There must be humility, which will gladly learn, if there is

ever to be its possession.

Nor can the man that moulds in idle cell

Unto her happy mansion attain.'

But in our days, the easier the attainment, the less the appreciation.

The queen of Sheba had no books, and she travelled far to get wisdom.

We are flooded with all appliances, and many of us would not cross the

road to get Solomon's wisdom, but would do much to be invited to feast

at his table, or to secure some of the queen's camels' load.

This story brings out the true ideal of Israel's relation to the

nations. Solomon is the embodiment of his people. His reign is marked

by largely increased and amicable relations with his neighbours. These

were not all wholesome, and ultimately led to much mischief. But, while

the purely commercial connection with Tyre was defective, in that there

was no attempt to bring Hiram and the men who worked for the Temple to

any knowledge of the God of the Temple, and the relation with Egypt was

more unsatisfactory still, in that it meant only the importation of

corrupting luxuries and the marriage with an Egyptian princess, an

idolatress, this relation with the queen of Sheba was the true one.

Solomon did in it what Israel was meant to do for the world. He

attracted a seeker from afar, and imparted to her the wisdom that God

had given him. He answered the torturing questions and won the

confidence of this woman who was groping in the dark, till he led her

by the hand to the light. A bond of friendship knit them together, and

mutual gifts cemented their amity.

All this is but the putting into concrete form of God's purpose in

choosing Israel for His own. It was not meant to retain or to enclose,

but to diffuse, the light. The world can only get blessing by one man

or people getting it first. As well charge the builder of the

lighthouse with partiality because he puts the bright lamps in that

narrow room, as find fault with the divine method of making the earth

know His name. The lighthouse is reared that the beams may stream out

over the tossing, nightly sea. So God appointed to His people of old

their task. So He has appointed the same task to His Church to-day. We

ought to attract seekers from afar, to win their frank speech when they

come, to be able to answer their anxious questions, and to bind them to

ourselves in grateful bonds. In these days there are multitudes

harassed by the modern forms of the same old, ever-pressing riddles

which burdened this ancient queen's heart; and that Church but ill

discharges its office which repels rather than draws the seekers, or

has no word of illumination for them if they come.

But the highest use to be made of the story is that which Christ made

of it. It stands as a perpetual witness against those who are too blind

to see the beauty, or too careless to be drawn to listen to the wisdom,

of a present Christ. The sacrifices which men can make for lower

objects are the most powerful rebukes of their unwillingness to make

sacrifices for the highest, just as their capacity of love and trust is

of their not loving and trusting Him. The same energy and effort which

this queen put forth to reach Solomon, and which men eagerly put forth

for some temporal good, would suffice to bring them to the feet of the

great Teacher. Her longing for wisdom, her discernment of the person

who could give it, and her toilsome journey, rebuke men's indifference

to Christ's gifts, their failure to recognise His sweetness and power

to make blessed, and their laziness and self-indulgence, which will not

take a hundredth part of the pains to secure heaven which they

cheerfully expend, and that often in vain, to secure earth. Will the

Queen of the south' stand alone as witness in that day, or will there

not be many out of other lands, who, like her, stretched out their

hands to the dimly descried but yearned-for light, and came nearer to

it, though they seemed far off, than many who lived in its full blaze

and never cared for it? Will it be only Christ's contemporaries who

will be condemned by heathen seekers after God, or will there be many

of ourselves, convicted of stolid indifference to the Christ who has

been beside us all our lives, and has prayed us with much entreaty' and

in vain, to receive the gift'?

They who find their way to Him, and tell Him all that is in their

hearts, will have all their questions solved. We have not far to go;

for a greater than Solomon is here.' If we betake ourselves to Him, and

learn of Him, we too shall find that the half was not told us'; for

Christ possessed is sweeter than all expectation, however high-pitched

it may be, and to win Him is the only gain in which there is no

disappointment, either at first or at last. We may all have the

blessedness of His servants, which stand continually before' Him, and

not only hear' but receive into their spirits His wisdom.'

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THE FALL OF SOLOMON

For it came to pass, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned away

his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord

his God, as was the heart of David his father. 5. For Solomon went

after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, and after Milcom the

abomination of the Ammonites. 6. And Solomon did evil in the sight of

the Lord, and went not fully after the Lord, as did David his father.

7. Then did Solomon build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of

Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the

abomination of the children of Ammon. 8. And likewise did he for all

his strange wives, which burnt incense and sacrificed unto their gods.

9. And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart was turned

from the Lord God of Israel, which had appeared unto him twice, 10. And

had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after

other gods: but he kept not that which the Lord commanded. 11.

Wherefore the Lord said unto Solomon, Forasmuch as this is done of

thee, and thou hast not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have

commanded thee, I will surely rend the kingdom from thee, and will give

it to thy servant. 12. Notwithstanding in thy days I will not do it for

David thy father's sake: but I will rend it out of the hand of thy son.

13. Howbeit I will not rend away all the kingdom; but will give one

tribe to thy son for David My servant's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake

which I have chosen.'--1 KINGS xi. 4-13.

Scripture never blinks the defects of its heroes. Its portraits do not

smooth out wrinkles, but, with absolute fidelity, give all faults. That

pitiless truthfulness is no small proof of its inspiration. If these

historical books were simply fragments of national records, owning no

higher source than patriotism, they would never have blurted out the

errors and sins of David and Solomon as they do. Where else are there

national histories of which the very central idea is the laying bare of

national sins and chastisements? or where else are there legends of the

people's heroes which tell their sins without apology or reticence? The

difference in tone augurs a different origin. The Old Testament

histories are not written to tell Israel's glories, or even, we may

say, to recount its history, but to tell God's dealings with Israel,--a

very different theme, and one which finds its material equally in the

glories and in the miseries, which respectively follow its obedience

and disobedience. So Solomon's fall is told in the same frank way as

his wisdom and wealth; for what is of importance is not Solomon so much

as God's dealings with Solomon, when his heart was turned away. We are

told that the narrative of Solomon's reign is an ideal picture. Strange

idealising which leaves the ideal king wallowing in a sty of sensuality

and an apostate from Jehovah!

Here we are simply told of the two things,--his sin, and the divine

judgment which it drew after it.

I. Verses 4-8 tell the black story of Solomon's apostasy. What was its

extent? Did he himself take part in idolatrous worship, or simply, with

the foolish fondness of an old sensualist, let these foreign women have

their shrines? The darker supposition seems correct. The expression

that he went after other gods' is commonly used to mean actual

idolatry; and his wives could scarcely have been said to have turned

away his heart,' if all that he did was to wink at, or even to

facilitate, their worship. But, on the other hand, he does not seem to

have abandoned Jehovah's worship. The charge against him is that his

heart was not perfect,' or wholly devoted to the Lord, or, as verse 6

puts it, that he went not fully' after the Lord. His was a case of

halting between two opinions, or rather, of trying to hold both at

once. He wanted to be a worshipper of Jehovah and of these idols also.

Was his apostasy final? Yes, so far as we can gather from the

narrative. Not only is there no statement of his repentance, but the

silence with which he receives the divine announcement of retribution

is suspicious; and the prophecy of Ahijah to Jeroboam, which obviously

comes later in time than the threatenings of the text, treats the

idolatry as still existing (verse 33). Further, we learn from 2 Kings

xxiii. 13 that the shrines which he built stood till Josiah's time. If

Solomon had ever abandoned his idolatry, he would not have left them

standing. So we seem to have in him a case of a fall which knew no

recovery, an eclipse which did not pass. The Book of Ecclesiastes, if

of his composition, would somewhat lighten the darkness of such an end;

but his authorship of it is now all but universally given up.

So there, on Olivet's southern ridge, right opposite the Temple, stood

the three altars, and there the king worshipped; and, if he did, he

would have a crowd of imitators. The lessons of such a fall are many.

First, it teaches the destructive effect of yielding to sensual

indulgence. Solomon's unbridled and monstrous polygamy sapped his

manhood and his principle, darkened his clear spirit, blinded his keen

eye, and turned a youth of noble aspiration and a manhood of noble

accomplishment into an old age without dignity, reverence, or calm. All

his wisdom was worth little if it could not keep him master of himself.

A young man who lets his passions run away with him is less to be

condemned than an old sensualist. God means that reason should govern

impulses and desires, and that conscience should govern all and be

governed by His will. The vessel is sure to be wrecked when the

officers are sent below and the mutineers get hold of the helm.

Second, it warns us that till the very end of life a fall is possible.

This ship went down when the voyage was nearly over. In sight of port

it struck, and that not for want of beacons. What pathetic warning lies

in that phrase, when Solomon was old'! After so many years of high

aims, so many temptations overcome, with such habits of wisdom and

kingly nobility, after such prayers and visions, he fell; and, if he

fell, who can be sure of standing? No length of life spent in holy

thoughts and service secures us against the possibility of disastrous

fall. Only one thing does,--Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe!' John

Bunyan saw a door opening down to hell hard by the gates of the

Celestial City. When a man that has been had in reputation for wisdom

and honour shames the record of his life by a great splash of mud on

the white page, near its end, he seldom returns. An old apostate is

usually finally an apostate.

Third, may we not venture to see a warning here against marriages in

which there is not unity in the deepest things, and a common faith?

When you run in double harness, take a good look at the other horse.'

If a young Christian man or woman enters on such a union with one who

is not a Christian, it is a great deal more probable that, in the end,

there will be two unbelievers than that there will be two Christians.

We have nothing to do with pronouncing on Solomon's final condition,

But he stands on the page of this history, a sad, enigmatical figure, a

warning to all young people to take heed that the attrition of the

world does not rub off the bloom of early religion, or make them

cynically ashamed of the unselfishness of their early desires. There is

no sadder sight than an old man whose youthful enthusiasm for goodness

and belief in the super-excellency of wisdom have withered, leaving him

a hard worldling or a gross sensualist. Better the early days, when he

was obscure and poor, and believed in wisdom and in the God of wisdom,

than the late ones, when worldly success has spoiled him!

II. Verses 9-13 give the divine retribution announced. The immediate

connection of sin and punishment is the teaching intended by this close

juxtaposition of these two halves of our narrative. However long the

chastisement may be in bursting, the divine resolve to send it is

instantaneously consequent on the crime. The chain that binds departure

from God with loss of blessing may be of many or few links, but it is

riveted on when the evil is done. How gravely, as with the voice of an

indictment drawn in heaven, the aggravations of Solomon's crime are set

out, in that he had sinned against the Lord' who had appeared to him

twice (once in his youthful vision, and once after the completion of

the Temple), and had commanded him concerning' the very sin that he had

done. Sin is made more heinous by the abundance of God's favours and

the plainness of His commands. If we would remember God's appearances

to us and for us, and meditate on His revealed will, we should be more

impregnable to the assaults of temptation.

We do not learn how the Lord said this to Solomon. Possibly it was by

the same prophet who afterwards announced to Jeroboam his destiny; but,

however announced, it seems to have been received in sullen silence,

and to have wrought no softening nor change. Like all God's

threatenings, it was spoken that it might not be inflicted. Solomon was

threatened before the prophet spoke to Jeroboam; and if Solomon had

repented, Jeroboam would never have been spoken to. But he is too far

gone to be stopped, though he has God's own word for it that he is

ruining his kingdom by his sin. We have as clear declarations of worse

results from ours; but they do not stop some of us. How strange it is

that men will put out their hands to grasp their sins, even though they

have to stretch across the smoke of the pit for them!

Note how forbearance delays and diminishes retribution. The separation

of the kingdom is deferred, and one tribe is left to the Davidic house;

probably Judah is meant, and Benjamin is omitted as being small.

Observe, too, how we have a double instance of the law of God's

providence which visits the father's deeds on the children. The

consequences of David's goodness fall on Solomon, and the consequences

of Solomon's evil fall on Rehoboam. Stated in the language of the

secular historian, that is to say that the consequences of great

national virtues or crimes are seldom reaped by the generation that

sowed the seed and did the deed, but take time to mature and work

themselves out. Stated in the language of Scripture, it is, The fathers

have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' The

separation of the kingdom was not brought about by miracle, but came in

the natural course of things. A people ground down by heavy taxation

and forced labour, to keep up the luxury of a court containing all that

disgusting crowd of wives and concubines, was ripe for revolt, and when

the sceptre fell into the hands of a headstrong fool, and there was a

capable leader on the other side, discontent soon became rebellion, and

rebellion soon became triumphant. It all flowed as naturally as

possible from the same fountain as the idolatry of which it was the

punishment; and so it teaches once more the great truth that the

world's history is the world's judgment,' and that the so-called

natural consequences' of our deeds are, even here and now, God's

retribution for our deeds.

What a lesson as to God's great patience is here! What a solemn glimpse

into man's power to counterwork God's purpose! So soon after its

establishment did the house of David prove unworthy, and the experiment

fail. Yet that long-suffering purpose is not turned aside, but

persistently and patiently goes on its way, altering its methods, but

keeping its end unaltered, bending even sin to minister to its design,

pitying and warning the sinner ere it strikes the blow that the sinner

has made needful.

Behind the figure of Solomon we see another. The wisest of men fell

shamefully, captured by coarse lust, and apparently steeled against all

remonstrances from Heaven. A greater than Solomon is here.' The faults

of the human kings of Israel prophesy of the true King, who is to be

the substance of which they were but faint shadows, and whose manhood

was stained by no flaw, nor His kingdom ever rent from His pure hands.

Solomon was wise, but Christ is Wisdom.' Solomon built a Temple, but

also altars to false gods overtopping it across the valley; and his

Temple was burned with fire. But Christ is the true Temple as well as

Priest and Sacrifice. Solomon was by name the peaceful,' and his land

had outward rest, darkened at the last by war and rebellion. But Christ

is the Prince of Peace, and of His dominion there shall be no end.

Solomon is the great example of the sad truth that the loftiest and

wisest share in the universal sinfulness. Christ is the one flawless

Man, who makes those who take Him for their King wise and peaceful,

prosperous, and in due time sinless, like Himself.

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THE NEW GARMENT RENT

And Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's

servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow woman, even he lifted

up his hand against the king. 27. And this was the cause that he lifted

up his hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and repaired the

breaches of the city of David his father. 28. And the man Jeroboam was

a mighty man of valour: and Solomon seeing the young man that he was

industrious, he made him ruler over all the charge of the house of

Joseph. 29. And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out of

Jerusalem, that the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite found him in the way;

and he had clad himself with a new garment; and they two were alone in

the field: 30. And Ahijah caught the new garment that was on him, and

rent it in twelve pieces: 31. And he said to Jeroboam, Take thee ten

pieces: for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend

the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to

thee: 32. (But he shall have one tribe for My servant David's sake, and

for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the

tribes of Israel:) 33. Because that they have forsaken Me, and have

worshipped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Zidonians, Chemosh the god of

the Moabites, and Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not

walked in My ways, to do that which is right in Mine eyes, and to keep

My statutes and My judgments, as did David his father. 34. Howbeit I

will not take the whole kingdom out of his hand: but I will make him

prince all the days of his life for David My servant's sake, whom I

chose because he kept My commandments and My statutes: 35. But I will

take the kingdom out of his ion's hand, and will give it unto thee,

even ten tribes. 36. And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David

My servant may have a light alway before Me in Jerusalem, the city

which I have chosen Me to put My name there. 37. And I will take thee,

and thou shalt reign according to all that thy soul desireth, and shalt

be king over Israel. 38. And it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all

that I command thee, and wilt walk in My ways, and do that is right in

My sight, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant

did; that I will be with thee, and build thee a sure house, as I built

for David, and will give Israel unto thee. 39. And I will for this

afflict the seed of David, but not for ever. 40. Solomon sought

therefore to kill Jeroboam. And Jeroboam arose, and fled into Egypt,

unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt until the death of

Solomon. 41. And the rest of the acts of Solomon, and all that he did,

and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of

Solomon? 42. And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all

Israel was forty years. 43. And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was

buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in

his stead.'--1 KINGS xi. 26-43.

Solomon falls into the background in the last part of the story of his

reign, and his enemies are more prominent than himself. So long as he

walked with God, he was of importance for the historian; but as soon as

he forsook God, and was consequently forsaken of His wisdom, he becomes

as insignificant as an empty vessel which has once held sweet perfume,

or a piece of carbon through which the electric current has ceased to

flow. The sunbeam has left that peak, and shines on other summits.

Never was there a sadder eclipse.

We are here told first how the instrument for shattering Solomon's

kingdom was shaped by himself. It is the old story of a young man of

mark, attracting the eyes of the king, being promoted to offices of

trust, which at once stir ambition, and give prominence and influence

which seem to afford a possibility of gratifying it. The passion for

building, so common in Eastern kings, and the cause of so much misery

to their subjects, had grown on Solomon; and as his later days were

harassed by war, and he had lost the safe defence of God's arm,

Jerusalem had to be enclosed by a wall. His father had been able to

leave a breach' because the Lord was a wall round him and his city; and

if Solomon had kept in his paths, he would have had no need to add to

the fortifications. The preservation of ancestral piety is for nations

and individuals a surer protection than the improvement of ancestral

outward defences. Jeroboam made himself conspicuous by his energy (for

that rather than valour' must be the meaning of the word), and so got

promotion. It was natural, but at the same time dangerous, to put him

in command of the forced labour of his own tribe, as the narrative

shows us was done; for the house of Joseph' is the tribe of Ephraim, to

which, according to the correct translation of verse 26, he belonged.

In such an office he would be thrown among his kinsmen, and would at

once gain influence and learn to sympathise with their discontent, or,

at any rate, to know where the sore places were, if he ever wanted to

inflame them. One can easily fancy the grumblings of the Ephraimites

dragged up to Jerusalem to the hated labour, which Samuel had predicted

(1 Samuel viii. 16), and how facile it would be for the officer in

charge to fan discontent or to win friends by judicious indulgence. How

long this went on we do not know, but the fire had smouldered for some

time under the unconscious king's very eyes, when it was fanned into a

flame by Ahijah's breath.

That is the second stage in the story,--the spark on the tinder. We

have heard nothing of prophets during Solomon's reign; but now this man

from Shiloh, the ancient seat of the Tabernacle, meets the ambitious

young officer in some solitary spot, with the message which answered to

his secret thoughts and made his heart beat fast. The symbolic action

preceding the spoken word, as usual, supplied the text, of which the

word was the explanation and expansion. How pathetic is the newness of

the garment! Unworn, strong, and fresh, it yet is rent in pieces. So

the kingdom is so recent, with such possibilities of duration, and yet

it must be shattered! Thus quickly has the experiment broken down! It

is little more than a century since Saul's anointing, little more than

seventy years since the choice of David, and already the fabric, which

had such fair promise of perpetuity, is ready to vanish away. If we may

say so, that new garment' represents the divine disappointment and

sorrow over the swift corruption of the kingdom. It was probably merely

some loose square of cloth which Ahijah tore, with violence

proportioned to its newness, into twelve pieces, ten of which he thrust

into the astonished Jeroboam's hands. The commentary followed.

Ahijah's prophecy is substantially the same as the previous

threatenings to Solomon, which had done no good. Their incipient

fulfilment in the wars with Edom and Syria had been equally futile; and

therefore God, who never strikes without warning, and never warns

without striking if men do not heed, now drops the message into ears

that were only too ready to hear. The seed fell on prepared soil, and

Jeroboam's half-formed plans would be consolidated and fixed. The scene

is like that in which the witches foretell to Macbeth his dignity.

Slumbering ambitions are stirred, and a half-inclined will is finally

determined by the glimpse into the future. How easily men are persuaded

that God speaks, and how willing they are to obey, when their

inclinations jump with Heaven's commandments! The prophet's message

makes the separation of the kingdoms a direct divine act, and yet it

was the breaking up of a divine institution. God's dealings have to be

shaped according to facts, and He changes His methods, and lets the

feebleness of His creatures and their sins mould His august procedure.

The divine Potter, like mere human artisans, has His spoiled pieces of

work, and, with infinite resource and patience as infinite, re-shapes

the clay into other forms. The separation of the kingdoms was a divine

act, and yet it is treated often in the later books as a crime and

rebellion. God works out His purposes through men's deeds, and their

motives determine whether their acts are sins or obedience. A man may

be a rebel while he is doing the will of God, if what he does be done

at the bidding of his own selfishness. The separation of the kingdoms

was God's doing, but it was brought about by the free action of men

obeying most secular impulses of political discontent, and led by a

cunning, self-seeking schemer.

Note that the prophecy is in three parts. First, verses 31-33 announce

the punishment, with the reservation of a dwindled dominion to the

Davidic house, for the sake of their great ancestor and of God's choice

of Jerusalem, and solemnly charge on the people the idolatry which the

king had introduced. The second part (verses 34-36) postpones the

execution of the sentence till after Solomon's death, and assigns the

same two reasons for this further forbearance. The third part (verses

37-39) promises Jeroboam the kingdom, and lays down the conditions on

which the favours promised to David and his house may be his. The whole

closes with the assurance that the affliction of the seed of David is

not to be for ever.

The punishment was heavy; for the disruption of the kingdom meant the

wreck of all the prosperity of Solomon's earlier days, the hopeless

weakness of the divided tribes as against the formidable powers that

pressed in on them from north and south, frequent intestine wars,

bitter hatred instead of amity. Yet there was another side to it; for

the very failure of the human kings made the Messianic hope the more

bright, like a light glowing in the deepening darkness, and tumult and

oppression might teach those whom prosperity and peace had only

corrupted. The great lesson for us is the ruin which follows on

departure from God. We do not see national sins followed with equal

plainness or swiftness by national judgments; but the history of Israel

is meant to show on a large scale what is always true, in the long run,

both for nations and for individuals, that it is an evil thing and a

bitter' to depart from the living God.

Mark, too, that the judgment is wrought out by perfectly natural

causes. The separation follows old lines of cleavage. The strength of

David's kingdom lay in the south; and Ephraim was too powerful a tribe

and too proud of its ancient glories, to acquiesce cheerfully in the

pre-eminence of Judah. The oppression of forced labour and heavy

taxation was put forward as the reason for the revolt, and, no doubt,

was the reason for the readiness with which the ten tribes rallied to

Jeroboam's flag. There are two ways of writing history. You can either

leave God out, or trace all to Him. The former way calls itself

scientific' and positive.' The latter is the Bible way. Perhaps, if

modern history were written on the same principles as the Books of

Kings, the divine hand would be as plainly visible,--only it requires

an inspired historian to do it. The way of bringing about the judgment

for departing from God has changed, but the judgment remains the same

to-day as when Ahijah rent his garment.

Between verses 39 and 40 we must suppose an attempt at armed rebellion

by Jeroboam. That is implied by the expression that he lifted his hand

against the king' (verses 26, 27). That attempt must have been put down

by Solomon. And that it should have been made shows how little Jeroboam

was influenced by religious motives. The prophet's words had set him

all afire with ambitious hopes, and he paid no heed to the distinct

assurance that Solomon was to be prince all the days of his life.' He

stretched out a rash, self-willed hand to snatch the promised crown,

and broke God's commandment even while he pretended to be keeping it.

How different David's conduct in like circumstances! He took no steps

to bring about the fulfilment of Samuel's promise at his anointing, but

patiently waited for God to do as He had said, in His own time, and

meantime continued his lowly work. God's time is the best time; and he

who greedily grasps at a premature fulfilment of promised good will

have to pay for it by defeat and exile from the modest good that he

had.

Jeroboam's flight to Egypt brings that ill-omened name on the page for

the first time since the Exodus. It has given occasion to an

extraordinary addition to the Septuagint, professing to tell his

adventures there,--how he was high in Shishak's favour, and married a

princess. That is apparently pure legend; but his residence there was

important, as the beginning of Egypt's interference in Israel's

affairs. It is an old trick of aggressive nations to side with a

pretender to the throne of a country which they covet, and benevolently

to strengthen him that he may weaken it. No doubt it was as Jeroboam's

ally that Shishak invaded Judah in the fifth year of Rehoboam, and

plundered the Temple and the palace. It was a bad beginning for a king

of Israel to be a pensioner of Egypt.

The narrative closes with the sad, reticent formula which ends each

reign, and in Solomon's case hides so much that is tragic and dark.

This was all that could be said about the end of a career that had

begun so nobly. If more had been said, the record would have been

sadder; and so the pitying narrative casts the veil of the stereotyped

summary over the miserable story. There are many instances in history

of lives of genius and enthusiasm, of high promise and partial

accomplishment, marred and flung away, but none which present the great

tragedy of wasted gifts, and blossoms never fruited, in a sharper, more

striking form than the life of the wise king of Israel, who in his

latter days' was a fool.' The goodliest vessel may be shipwrecked in

sight of port. Solomon was not an old man, as we count age, when he

died; for he reigned forty years, and was somewhere about twenty when

he became king. But it was when he was old' that he fell, and that

through passion which should have been well under control long before.

The sun went down in a thick bank of clouds, which rose from undrained

marshes in his soul, and stretched high up in the western horizon. His

career, in its glory and its shame, preaches the great lesson which the

Book of Ecclesiastes puts into his mouth as the conclusion of the whole

matter': Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole

duty of man.'

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HOW TO SPLIT A KINGDOM

And Rehoboam went to Shechem: for all Israel were come to Shechem to

make him king. 2. And it came to pass, when Jeroboam the son of Nebat,

who was yet in Egypt, heard of it (for he was fled from the presence of

king Solomon, and Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt); 3. That they sent and

called him. And Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and

spake unto Rehoboam, saying, 4. Thy father made our yoke grievous: now

therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy

yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. 6. And he

said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And

the people departed. 6. And king Rehoboam consulted with the old men,

that stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, and said, How

do ye advise that I may answer this people? 7. And they spake unto him,

saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt

serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they

will be thy servants for ever. 8. But he forsook the counsel of the old

men, which they had given him, and consulted with the young men that

were grown up with him, and which stood before him: 9. And he said unto

them, What counsel give ye that we may answer this people, who have

spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke which thy father did put upon us

lighter? 10. And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto

him, saying, Thus shalt thou speak unto this people that spake unto

thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter

unto us; thus shalt thou say unto them, My little finger shall be

thicker than my father's loins. 11. And now whereas my father did lade

you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath

chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. 12.

So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the

king had appointed, saying, Come to me again the third day. 13. And the

king answered the people roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel

that they gave him; 14. And spake to them after the counsel of the

young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, and I will add to

your yoke: my father also chastised you with whips, but I will chastise

you with scorpions. 15. Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the

people; for the cause was from the Lord, that He might perform His

saying, which the Lord spake by Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam the

son of Nebat. 16. So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not

unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we

in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your

tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed

unto their tents. 17. But as for the children of Israel which dwelt in

the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.'--1 KINGS xii. 1-17.

The separation of the kingdom of Solomon into two weak and hostile

states is, in one aspect, a wretched story of folly and selfishness

wrecking a nation, and, in another, a solemn instance of divine

retribution working its designs by men's sins. The greater part of this

account deals with it in the former aspect, and shows the despicable

motives of the men in whose hands was the nation's fate; but one

sentence (verse 15) draws back the curtain for a moment, and shows us

the true cause. There is something very striking in that one flash,

which reveals the enthroned God, working through the ignoble strife

which makes up the rest of the story. This double aspect of the

disruption of the kingdom is the main truth about it which the

narrative impresses on us.

As to the mere details of the incident, as a political revolution, they

are in four stages. First come the terms of allegiance offered to the

new king. Rehoboam goes to Shechem, because Israel was gone' there. The

choice of the place is suspicious; for it was in the tribe of Ephraim,

and had been for a time the centre of national life; and its selection

at once indicated discontent with the preponderance of Jerusalem, and a

wish to assert the importance of the central tribes. No doubt, the

choice of the latter city for the capital had caused heart-burning,

even during David's time.

Adopting the reading of the Revised Version, we see another suspicious

sign in the recall of Jeroboam, and his selection as spokesman; for he

had been in rebellion against Solomon (1 Kings xi. 26), and therefore

an exile. Probably he had now been the instigator of the discontent of

which he became the mouthpiece; and, in any case, his appearance as the

leader was all but a declaration of war. His former occupation as

superintendent of the forced labour exacted from his own tribe taught

him where the shoe pinched, and the weight of the yoke would not be

lessened in his representations.

No doubt, the luxury and splendour of Solomon's brilliant reign had an

under side of oppression, even though forced labour was not exacted

from Israelites (1 Kings ix. 22); but probably the severity was

exaggerated in these complaints, which were plainly the pretext for a

revolt of which tribal jealousy was the main cause, and Jeroboam's

ambition the spark that set light to the train. Certainly there was

ignoring of the benefits of the peaceful reign, which had brought

security and commerce. But there was enough truth in the complaint to

make it plausible and effective for catching the people. Had they a

right to suspend their allegiance on compliance with their terms?

Israel was neither a despotism, nor simply a constitutional monarchy.

God appointed the kings, and had ordained the Davidic house to the

throne; and therefore this making terms was, in effect, asserting

independence of God's will. Jeroboam was scheming for a crown. The

people were shaking off their submission to God. It is very doubtful if

concession would have conciliated them. There is nothing elevated, not

to say religious, in their motives or acts.

Then comes Rehoboam on the scene. The one sensible thing that he did

was to take three days to think. Whether or no his little finger was

thicker than his father's loins, his head was not half so wise.

Ecclesiastes, speaking in Solomon's name, reckons it a great evil that

he must leave his labour to his successor; and who knoweth whether he

shall be a wise man or a fool?' Certainly Rehoboam had little wisdom'

either of the higher or lower kind. It was the lower kind which the old

counsellors of his father gave him,--that wisdom which is mere cunning

directed to selfish ends, and careless of honour or truth. Flatter them

to-day, speak them fair, promise what you do not mean to keep, and

then, when you are firm in the saddle, let them feel bit and spur.'

That was all these grey-headed men had learned. If that was what passed

for wisdom' in Solomon's later days, we need not wonder at revolt.

To act on such motives is bad enough, but to put them into plain words,

and offer them as the rule of a king's conduct, is a depth of cynical

contempt for truth and kingly honour that indicates only too clearly

how rotten the state of Israel was. Have we never seen candidates for

Parliament and the like on one side of the water, and for Congress,

Senate, or Presidency on the other, who have gone to school to the old

men at Shechem? The prizes of politicians are often still won by this

stale device. The young counsellors differ only in the means of gaining

the object. Neither set has the least glimmer of the responsibility of

the office, nor ever thinks that God has any say in choosing the king.

Naked, undisguised selfishness animates both; only, as becomes their

several ages, the one set recommends crawling and the other bluster.

Think of Saul hiding among the staff, David going back to his sheep

after he was anointed, Solomon praying for wisdom to guide this people,

and measure the depth of descent to this ignoble scramble for the

sweets of royalty!

According to I Kings xiv. 21, Rehoboam was forty-one at this time, so

his contemporaries could not have been very young. But possibly the

number in the present text is an error for twenty-one, which would

agree better with the tone of the reference to age here, and with the

rash counsel. Note the recurrence, both in Rehoboam's question in verse

9 and in the young advisers' answer in verse 10, of the obnoxious

speech of the people. That may be accidental, but it sounds as if both

he and they were keeping their anger warm by repeating the offensive

complaint.

The Revised Version reads, My little finger is thicker,' etc., and so

makes the sentence not a threat, but the foundation of the following

threat in an arrogant and empty assertion of greater power. The fool

always thinks himself wiser than the wise dead; the living dog' fancies

that his yelp is louder than the roar of the dead lion.' What can be

done with a Rehoboam who brags that he is better than Solomon?

The threat which follows is inconceivably foolish; and all the more so

because it probably did not represent any definite intention, and

certainly was backed by no force adequate to carry it out. Passion and

offended dignity are the worst guides for conduct. Threats are always

mistakes. A sieve of oats, not a whip, attracts a horse to the halter.

If Rehoboam had wished to split the kingdom, he could have found no

better wedge than this blustering promise of tyranny.

Next in this miserable story of imbecility and arrogance comes the

answer to the assembly. Shechem had seen many an eventful hour, but

never one heavier with important issues than that on which the united

Israel met for the last time, and there, in the rich valley with Ebal

and Gerizim towering above them, heard the fateful answer of this

braggart. A dozen rash words brought about four hundred years of

strife, weakness, and final destruction. And neither the foolish

speaker nor any man in that crowd dreamed of the unnumbered evils to

flow from that hour. Since issues are so far beyond our sight, how

careful it becomes us to be of motives! Angry counsels are always

blunders. No nation can prosper when moderate complaints are met by

threats, and spirited conduct,' asserting dignity, is a sign of

weakness, not of strength. For nations and individuals that is true.

Here the historian draws back the curtain. On earth stand the insolent

king and the now mutinous people, each driving at their ends, and

neither free of sin in their selfishness. A stormy scene of passion,

without thought of God, rages below, and above sits the Lord, working

His great purpose by men's sin. That divine control does not in the

least affect the freedom or the guilt of the actors. Rehoboam's

disregard of the people's terms was a thing brought about of the Lord,'

but it was Rehoboam's sin none the less. That which, looked at from the

mere human side, is the sinful result of the free play of wrong

motives, is, when regarded from the divine side, the determinate

counsel of God. The greatest crime in the world's history was at the

same time the accomplishment of God's most merciful purpose. Calvary is

the highest example of the truth, which embraces all lesser instances

of the wrath of man, which He makes to praise Him and effect His deep

designs.

Again, the rending of the kingdom was the punishment of sin, especially

Solomon's sin of idolatry, which was closely connected with the

extravagant expenditure that occasioned the separation. So the

so-called natural consequences of transgression constitute its temporal

punishment in part, and behind all these our eyes should be

clear-sighted enough to behold the operative will of God. This one

piercing beam of light, cast on that scene of insolence and rebellion,

lights up all history, and gives the principle on which it must be

interpreted, if it is not to be misread.

Again, the punishment of sin, whether that of a community or of a

single person, is sin. The separation was sin, on both sides; it led to

much more. It was the consequence of previous departure. So ever the

worst result of any sin is that it opens the door, like a thief who has

crept in through a window, to a band of brethren.

Lastly, we have the fierce rejoinder to the empty boast of Rehoboam,

and the definitive disruption of the nation. Jeroboam must have fanned

the flame skilfully, or it would not have burst out so quickly. There

is no hesitation, nor any regret. The ominous cry, which had been heard

before, in Sheba's abortive revolt, answers Rehoboam with instantaneous

and full-throated defiance. Rancorous tribal hatred is audible in it.

Long pent up jealousy and dislike of the dynasty of David has got

breath at last: To your tents, O Israel! now see to thine own house,

David!'

That roar from a thousand voices meant a good deal more than the cowed

king's vain threats did. The angry men who raised it, and were the

tools of a crafty conspirator, the frightened courtiers and king who

heard it, were alike in their entire oblivion of their true Lord and

Monarch. God was not in all their thoughts.' An enterprise begun in

disregard of Him is fated to failure. The only sure foundations of a

nation are the fear of the Lord and obedience to His will. If politics

have not a religious basis, the Lord will blow upon them, and they will

be as stubble.

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POLITICAL RELIGION

Then Jeroboam built Shechera in mount Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and

went out from thence, and built Penuel. 26. And Jeroboam said in his

heart, Now shall the kingdom return to the house of David: 27. If this

people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem,

then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even

unto Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to

Rehoboam king of Judah. 28. Whereupon the king took counsel, and made

two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up

to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of

the land of Egypt. 29. And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put

he in Dan. 30. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to

worship before the one, even unto Dan. 31. And he made an house of high

places, and made priests of the lowest of the people, which were not of

the sons of Levi. 32. And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth

month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is

in Judah; and he offered upon the altar. So did he in Beth-el,

sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed In Beth-el

the priests of the high places which he had made. 33. So he offered

upon the altar which he had made in Beth-el the fifteenth day of the

eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart;

and ordained a feast unto the children of Israel: and he offered upon

the altar, and burnt incense.'--1 KINGS xii. 25-33.

The details of this section need no long elucidation; for the one fact

which it records, namely, the establishment of the calf worship in

Israel, is the main point to consider. As for details, we need touch

them lightly. The building' of Shechem and Penuel is probably to be

understood as fortifying'; for, in regard to the former town, we know

from the preceding section that it was a town before the disruption,

and the same is probably true of the latter. Two fortresses, one in the

heart of his kingdom, one on the eastern border, where attack might be

expected, were Jeroboam's first care.

In estimating his conduct, the fact must be remembered that Ahijah had

promised him God's protection and the establishment of his kingdom in

his family, on the sole condition of obedience. If he had believed the

prophet, something else than building strongholds would have been his

prime aim. But he evidently thought that promises were all very well,

but thick walls were better. The two things recorded of him are quite

of a piece; and the writer seems, by putting them thus side by side, to

wish us to note their identity of motive and similarity in character.

The establishment of the calf worship was entirely due, according to

this historian, to dread that religious unity would heal the schism of

political duality, and that Jeroboam's kingdom and life would be

sacrificed to the magnetism which would draw the revolted northern

tribes back to render allegiance, where they went up to worship. The

calculation was reasonable: but why, in estimating chances, did

Jeroboam leave out God's promise? That should have kept him at ease.

The calves and the castles were signs of fear and of slight regard to

the prophet's word. No doubt, when it suited him, he could vindicate

rebellion on the plea of obeying God. The plea would have sounded more

genuine if he had shown that he trusted God.

The calves were probably suggested by his Egyptian experiences, where

he had seen sacred bulls worshipped living, and mummied dead. But the

remembrance of Aaron and the golden calf was evidently present to him,

as the almost verbal quotation of Aaron's words shows. If so, the whole

transaction is still more accentuated as a revolt against the ritual of

the central sanctuary. The much-calumniated Aaron is our example. He

was mastered by his brother, but he was right, and we go back to the

old original worship of our fathers.'

Jeroboam was among the first to employ the expedient, so often resorted

to since, of white-washing old-world criminals, in order to provide an

ancestry for modern heresies. The calves seem to have been doubled

simply as a matter of convenience. When once the principle of saving

trouble comes in, in religion, it generally plays a great part. If it

were too much to go to Jerusalem, it would soon be too much to go to

Bethel, and so Dan must be provided for the north. The calves were

symbols of Jehovah, not of other gods, as must be carefully noted. The

making of them implied all that followed; for a god must have shrine

and priesthood and sacrifice and festivals. The Levites refusing to

serve, and probably losing their inheritance, fled to Judah, and a new

priesthood was made from among all the people' (Rev. Ver.), The Feast

of Tabernacles was retained but its date shifted forward a month,

perhaps because the harvest, which it closed, was later in the north,

but evidently with the design of, as it were, underscoring the

religious separation.

The latter part of this passage should perhaps be attached more closely

to the next chapter, and understood as describing the one instance of

Jeroboam's sacrificing which was so grimly interrupted by the

denunciation by the anonymous prophet from Judah. Such are the outlines

of the facts. What are the lessons taught by them?

I. There is that one already mentioned,--the folly and sin of seeking

to help God to fulfil His promises by our poor efforts at making their

fulfilment sure to sense. No doubt many of His promises are contingent

on our activity in material things; and no man has a right to expect

that' his bread shall be given him,' for instance, unless he

contributes the sweat of his brow' towards it. But Jeroboam had had the

conditions of safety and stability clearly laid down. They were,

obedience after the pattern of David (1 Kings xi. 38). So there was no

need for building Shechem and Penuel, nor for casting calves and

serving them. The heavens will stand without our rearing brickwork

pillars to hold them up. But it takes much faith to trust God's bare

word, and we are all apt to feel safer if we have something for sense

to grasp. On the open plain, God guards those who trust Him more

securely than if they lay in cities fenced up to heaven. Jerusalem

shall be inhabited as towns without walls. . . . For I, saith the Lord,

will be unto her a wall of fire round about.'

II. Another lesson taught here is the sin of degrading religion to be a

mere instrument for securing personal ends. Jeroboam has had many

followers among politicians, The average statesman' looks on all

religions as equally true or untrue, and is ready to be polite to any

of them, if he can carry his measures thereby. The long history of the

relations of Church and State in the Old World has been little else

than the State's hiring and muzzling the Church for its own advantage,

and the protests of a faithful few against the degradation of State

patronage and consequent control.

In England, Jeroboam and his calves used to be the favourite shocking

example of the sin of schism, with which High Church orators were fond

of pelting Nonconformists. The true lesson from him and them is

precisely the opposite one; namely, the weakening of religion, when it

is favoured and endowed by the civil power. The priests of Bethel, who

were the creatures of Jeroboam, were not likely to be his or his

successors rebukers. When Amos the prophet spoke bold words against a

king, it was Amaziah the priest who gave the shameful counsel, O thou

seer, flee into the land of Judah, and prophesy there; but prophesy no

more at Bethel: for it is the king's sanctuary.' Is there no such thing

known as a flaming profession of religion, because it is respectable,

or opens the way to some good position? Does nobody pose in public,

especially about election times, as a liberal supporter of Churches and

a devout Church-member, with an eye mainly to votes? Do political

parties think it a good thing to get the religious people to go for

their ticket? Or, to take less base instances, is there not a whole

school who estimate Christianity mainly as valuable as a social force,

and, without any deep personal recognition of its loftier aspects,

think it well that it should be generally accepted, especially by other

people, as it makes them easier to govern, and cements the social

fabric?

Christianity is something more than social cement. Jeroboam's policy

was a great success, as policy. It both united his kingdom and

definitively separated it from Judah. But it was a success purchased at

the price of degrading religion into the lackey of a court. Samson went

to sleep on Delilah's lap, and she cut off the clustering locks in

which his strength lay.

III. The true nature of idolatry is brought out in the incident.

Jeroboam did not draw Israel away to worship other gods. No charge of

that sort is ever made against the calf worship. The images were meant,

just as Aaron's, of which they were a reproduction, was meant, to be

symbols of Jehovah. The true object of worship was worshipped in a

false way. No matter though the image represented Him, its worship was

idol worship. There is no ground in the narrative for the surmise of

Stanley,--who in this, as usual, simply says ditto to Ewald,--that

Jeroboam's motive was the desire to prevent Israel's adopting false

gods, and that the calves were a compromise by which he hoped to stem

the tide of apostasy to Baal worship. The single motive stated in the

text is policy inspired by fear. Jeroboam did not care enough about the

worship of Jehovah to mould his statecraft with the view of conserving

it. If he had so cared, he could not have set up the calves. His doing

so is uniformly regarded in Scripture as idolatry pure and simple; and

though it is clearly distinguished from the worship of false gods, it

is none the less branded as rebellion against Jehovah.

A visible representation of Jehovah was as much an idol as a similar

one of Baal would have been. It necessarily degraded the conception of

Him. It brought sense into dangerous prominence as an aid to worship.

The symbol might at first, and to the more devout, be a mere symbol,

and transparent; but it would soon become opaque, and from symbol turn

embodiment, and thence pass to being the very deity represented. It is

a feat of abstraction impossible for the ordinary man, to worship

before an idol, and not to worship the idol. The strange, awful

fascination which idolatry exercised is perhaps gone now from the

civilised world. But the lesson remains ever in season, that it is

dangerous work to bring in sense as an ally of devotion, because

outward things, which at first may be only symbols and helps, are

almost certain to become something more.

IV. Jeroboam may stand, finally, as a type of the men who suppose

themselves to be worshipping God when they are only following their own

wills. All his ceremonial had this damning characteristic, that it was

devised of his own heart'; and so it was himself that was enshrined in

his new house of the high places, and himself to whom the sacrifices

were offered. Absolute obedience to God's will, whatever perils may

seem to attend it, is true worship. Wherever apparent devotion to Him

is mingled with burning incense to our own net, the mixture ruins the

devotion. Obedience is better than sacrifice.' Temptations to take our

own way will often appear as the dictates of sound policy, and to

neglect them as culpable carelessness. But such paltering with plain

commandments is as ruinous as sinful, and is not to be atoned for by

outward worship.

What did Jeroboam win by his intrusion of self-will into the region

which ought to be sacred to perfect obedience? A troubled reign and the

destruction of his house after one generation. One more thing he won;

namely, that terrible epithet, which becomes almost a part of his name,

Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.' What a title to be

branded on a man's forehead for ever! It is always a mistake to disobey

God. Every sin is a blunder as well as a crime. This only is the safe

motto for churches and individuals, in all the details of worship and

of life: Lo, I come to do Thy will, O Lord, and Thy law is within my

heart.'

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THE RECORD OF TWO KINGS

In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign

over Israel, twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24. And he

bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver, and built

on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the

name of Shemer, owner of the hill, Samaria. 25. But Omri wrought evil

in the eyes of the Lord, and did worse than all that were before him.

26. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in

his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of

Israel to anger with their vanities. 27. Now the rest of the acts of

Omri which he did, and his might that he shewed, are they not written

in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 28. So Omri slept

with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria: and Ahab his son reigned

in his stead. 29. And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of

Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son

of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. 30. And

Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the Lord above all that

were before him. 31. And it came to pass, as if it had been a light

thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he

took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethibaal king of the Zidonians,

and went and served Baal, and worshipped him. 32. And he reared up an

altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33.

And Ahab made a grove; and Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of

Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.'--1

KINGS xvi. 23-33.

Jeroboam's son and successor was killed by Baasha, Baasha's son and

successor was killed by Zimri, who reigned for a week, and then burned

the palace and died in the flames. A struggle for the throne followed

between Omri, the commander-in-chief, and Tibni, Tibni died, and Omri

reigned.' So, in fifty years, the kingdom that was to relieve Israel

from oppression staggered through seas of blood, and four kings, or

would-be kings, died by violence.

Omri's dynasty lasted about as long, namely, through the reigns of four

kings, and was then swept away like the others, in blood and fire. The

text gives a meagre outline of the reigns of himself and his son Ahab,

of which perhaps the meagreness is the most significant feature. The

only fact told of the father is that he built Samaria, and his whole

reign is summed up in the damning sentence that he walked in the way of

Jeroboam.' We learn from the Moabite stone that he waged successful war

against that country, and that it was tributary to Israel for forty

years. In Micah vi. 16, mention is made of the statutes of Omri, as if

he had given edicts for idolatry. The reign of Ahab is similarly

summarised. His marriage with Jezebel, and the flood of Baal worship

which that let loose over the land, are told with horror, in

preparation for Elijah's appearance like a dark background that throws

up a brilliant figure.

The lessons to be drawn from these severely condensed records, cut down

to the bone, as it were, are plain. The first of them is, that when a

life is over, the one thing which lasts, or is worth thinking about, is

the man's relation to God and His will. Here are twelve years' reign in

the one case, and twenty-two in the other, all boiled down, so to

speak, into half a dozen sentences, and estimated according to one

standard only. What has become of all the eager strife, the joys and

sorrows, the hopes and fears, that burned so fiercely for awhile? All

died down into a handful of grey ashes. And what lies in them like a

lump of solid metal that has been melted out of the huge heap of days

and deeds that fed the fire? The man's relation to God. That abides;

that is recorded; that determines everything else about him. Waving

forests that once had sunshine pouring down on their green fronds are

represented in a thin seam of coal. Our lives will all come down to

this at last. How did he stand towards God and His will is the final

question that will be asked about each of us, and the answer to it is

the only thing that concerns the dead--or the living either. Men write

voluminous biographies of each other. How little their judgments matter

to the dead men! Praise or blame are equally indifferent to them. But

what matters is, whether God will have to record of us what is recorded

of these two wretched kings, or whether He will recognise that the main

drift of our poor lives was to serve Him and do His will. He was a

great scholar; he made a huge fortune; he rose to be a peer; she was a

noted beauty, a leader of fashion, a queen of society--what will all

such epitaphs be worth, if God's finger carves silently below them, He

did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord'?

Another lesson from these two reigns is the certain widening of the

smallest departure from God. Jeroboam professed to retain the worship

of Jehovah, and to introduce only a small alteration in setting up a

symbol of Him. He would vehemently have asserted that he was no

idolater, and would have shuddered at the very notion of bowing down to

the gods of the nations, but in less than fifty years a temple to the

Sidonian Baal rose in Samaria, and his worship, with its foul

sensuality, was corrupting all Israel. However acute the angle of

departure, the line has only to be prolonged, and the distance between

it and that from which it diverged will be the distance between heaven

and hell, Let no one say: Thus far and no farther will I go.' There is

no stopping at will on that course, any more than a man sliding down a

steeply sloping sheet of smooth ice can pull himself up before he

plunges over the edge into the abyss below. That is true as to all

departures from God and His law, but it is eminently true as to every

tampering with the spirituality of worship. Jeroboam's symbolism led

straight to Ahab's unblushing pagan worship of the hideous Sidonian

Baal. The craving for symbolical and sensuous accessories of worship,

which is strong in most Churches in this aesthetic generation, is

perilous. Material aids to worship there must be, so long as we are in

the flesh, but the fewer and simpler they are the better, for they are

aids which very swiftly become hindrances.

Another lesson from Ahab's reign is the need of detachment from

entangling alliances, if we would keep ourselves right with God. It was

Israel's calling to be separate from the nations. It was Israel's

temptation either to mix with them, or to keep aloof from them in

contempt and hatred. Ahab's marriage with Jezebel was, no doubt,

thought by his father a clever stroke of policy, assuring them of an

ally. But it flooded the nation with the cruel and lustful cult of

Baal, and that finally ruined Ahab and his house. God's servants can

never mingle themselves with His enemies without harm, unless they

mingle with them for the purpose of turning them into His servants. If

we prefer the company of those who do not love Jesus, our love to Him

must be faint, and will soon be fainter. If Ahab takes Jezebel for his

wife, Ahab will soon take Jezebel's foul god for his god.

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A PROPHET'S STRANGE PROVIDERS

And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said

unto Ahab, As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there

shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. 2. And

the word of the Lord came unto him, saying, 3. Get thee hence, and turn

thee eastward, and hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before

Jordan. 4. And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I

have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5. So he went and did

according unto the word of the Lord. for he went and dwelt by the brook

Cherith, that is before Jordan. 6. And the ravens brought him bread and

flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank

of the brook. 7. And it came to pass after a while, that the brook

dried up, because there had been no rain in the land. 8. And the word

of the Lord came unto him, saying, 9. Arise, get thee to Zarephath,

which belongeth to Zidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a

widow woman there to sustain thee. 10. So he arose and went to

Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold, the widow

woman was there gathering of sticks: and he called to her, and said,

Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink.

11. And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring

me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thine hand. 12. And she said, As

the Lord thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but an handful of meal in a

barrel, and a little oil in a cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two

sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may

eat it, and die. 13. And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as

thou hast said: but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it

unto me, and after make for thee and for thy son. 14. For thus saith

the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither

shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that the Lord sendeth rain

upon the earth. 15. And she went and did according to the saying of

Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days. 16. And the

barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according

to the word of the Lord, which He spake by Elijah.'--1 KINGS xvii.

1-16.

The worst times need the best men. The reign of Ahab brought a great

outburst of Baal worship, imported by his Phoenician wife, which

threatened to sweep away every trace of the worship of Jehovah. The

feeble king was absolutely ruled by the strongwilled Jezebel, and

everything seemed rushing down to ruin. One man arrests the downward

movement, and with no weapon but his word, and no support but his own

dauntless courage, which was the child of his faith, works a revolution

in Israel. Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a

greater than' Elijah the Tishbite. Bugged, stern, solitary, he has no

commission to reveal new truth. He is not a prophet,' like later ones

whose words were revelation.

Little is preserved of his sayings. His task was to reform and restore,

not to advance; and his endowments of spirit and power' corresponded to

his work. The striking peculiarities of this heroic figure will appear

as we go on with his history. For the present, we have to consider the

three points of this narrative.

I. The Prophet and the King.--The startling suddenness of Elijah's leap

into the arena, where he appears without preface or explanation, helps

the impression of extraordinary force which his whole career makes. He

crashes into the midst of Ahab's court like a thunderbolt. What did

Jezebel think of this wild man from the other side of Jordan, with his

long hair and his loose mantle, who thus fronted Ahab and her? Nothing

is told us of his descent; it is even questionable whether the reading

which calls him the Tishbite' is correct. We only know that he was of

Gilead, and therefore used to a ruder, freer, simpler life than that in

kings' palaces.

The natural conclusion from the narrative is that the prophet and the

king had never met before; and, if so, the stern brevity of the threat

is even more remarkable. In any case, the absence of explanation of

reasons for the drought, or of credentials of Elijah, or of offers of

mercy on condition of repentance, give a peculiarly grim aspect to the

message, and make it a dangerous one to carry to such a hearer as Ahab,

stirred up by Jezebel. When God commands us to speak, no thought of

peril must make us dumb. If the word of the Lord' is to sound from our

lips with power, it must first have absolute sway over ourselves. One

man with God at his back, who fears nothing, can work marvels.

God's servant is men's master. The vision of God's Presence paled the

splendour, and blunted the perils, of the court of Samaria. Ahab was

but a poor puppet in the sight of eyes that saw the Lord sitting on His

throne, high and lifted up.' So the very first words of Elijah lay bare

the secret spring of his fiery energy and courage. Before whom I

stand,'--that is the thought to put nerve, daring, and disregard of

earth into a man.

James's comment on this incident assumes that the declaration to Ahab

followed earnest prayer that it might not rain, and that the word'

which should end the drought was also prayer. The truest lover of his

country or of any men may sometimes have to wish for losses and

sorrows. Elijah did not open and shut the heavens, but his prayer had

power to move the Hand that openeth and no man shutteth.'

II. The Prophet and the Ravens.--One would like to know how Elijah made

his escape from Ahab; but the whole story is marked by sudden

appearances and disappearances. He flashes into sight and flames for a

moment, and then is swallowed up in the dark again. The exact position

of the brook Cherith is doubtful. It would seem most natural to look

for it across Jordan, as safer and more familiar ground to Elijah than

any of the tributaries on the western side. At all events, somewhere

among the savage rocks in some wady with a trickle of water down it,

and rank vegetation that would help to hide him, he lurked for an

indefinite period, alone with God.

Why did he flee? Not only for safety, but that the period of the

drought might be prolonged till it had done its work, and that the

prophet might learn more lessons for his calling. Good Obadiah would

have made a place for the chief of the prophets in his caves; but the

man who is to do work like Elijah's must live in solitude. Cherith was

part of the training for Carmel. The flight thither was as much an act

of obedient faith as was the appearance before the king. However the

necessity of flight was impressed on the prophet, it was impressed on

him as manifestly not his own plan, but God's command; and though the

journey was a weary one, and the appointed place of refuge

inhospitable, the command was unhesitatingly obeyed. He was not left to

wonder how he was to be fed when he got there, but God gave him, what

He seldom gives--a previous assurance of miraculous provision, which

obviously met some unspoken thought. We do not usually know how we are

to be fed in the solitude till we get there; but if our doubting hearts

object, But, Lord, there is nothing at Cherith but a brook and some

ravens,' He sometimes gives us assurance that these will be enough.

Whether or no, the duty is the same,--to follow God's voice, whether it

take us face to face with Ahab and Jezebel or into the wild gorge.

Note that the same words are employed about the ravens and the widow: I

have commanded the. . . to feed thee.' God has ways of reaching the

mysterious animal instinct and the mysterious human will, and each, in

its own way, obeys. It is needless to try to pare down the miracle by

saying that, of course, ravens would haunt the water-courses in

drought, and that the food which they brought might be for their young,

and so on. The daily regularity of the supply takes it out of the

natural category, to say nothing of the remarkable breed which the

ravens must have been of, if they brought their young ones' food within

reach and let the prophet take it.

People take offence at the abundance of miracles in the lives of Elijah

and Elisha, and assert that some of them, this among the rest, are for

unworthily trivial occasions. But the grave crisis in Israel is to be

taken into account, which involved the necessity for unusual

manifestations of divine power, and very evident credentials for the

prophets; and the preparation of Elijah for his tremendous struggle

was, even to our eyes, surely an adequate end for miracle. How could he

doubt that God had sent him and would care for him, with such memories

as those of his winged purveyors? How could he doubt future words which

should come to him, when he recalled how marvellously this one had been

fulfilled? The silence of the ravine, the long days and nights of

solitude, the punctual arrival of his food, would all tend to weld his

faith into yet more close-knit strength. If we may so say, it was worth

God's while to work miracles, to make Elijah. The highest end of

creation is the production of God-fearing men. All things serve the

soul that serves God.

III. The Prophet and the Widow.--The little stream that came down the

wady dried up after a while'; and Elijah, no doubt, would wonder what

was to be done next, as he saw it daily sending a thinner thread to

Jordan. But he was not told till the channel was dry, and the pebbles

in its bed bleaching in the sun. God makes us sometimes wait on beside

a diminishing rivulet, and keeps us ignorant of the next step, till it

is dry. Patience is an element in strength. It was a far cry from

Cherith to Zarephath, right across the kingdom of Ahab; and to run for

refuge to a dependency of Zidon, Jezebel's country, looked like putting

his head in the lion's mouth. But the same command' which the ravens

had obeyed had smoothed his way.

So he girded up his loins, and left, no doubt reluctantly, the brook

for a city. How his heart would bow in adoring thankfulness, when the

first person he saw outside the little city' was the widow'! He knew

her; did she know him? The natural interpretation of verse 9 is that,

at the time when God spoke to Elijah, he had already commanded' the

woman. But the despondent tone of her answer seems against that idea;

and perhaps we are to suppose that, just as the ravens were commanded

and knew not by whom, so this woman received the command, when she saw

the travel-stained and gaunt stranger, through her womanly impulses of

compassion, not knowing who moved them nor what she did when she

sheltered the man whose life was, at that moment, the most important in

the world. The motions of pity and charity are of God, and He commands

us to help when He sets before us those who need help.

The whole incident was a lesson to the prophet. He might well have

thought that God had sent him to a strange helper in this poor widow

with her empty cupboard; and it must have taken some faith on his part

to reassure her with his cheery Fear not!' The prediction of the

undiminishing stores demanded as much faith from its speaker as from

its hearer.

It was a lesson in faith for the woman too. Her use of the phrase the

Lord thy God' may imply some inclination to the worship of Jehovah, and

so there may have been a little glimmer of faith in her; but she was

full of sorrow and despair, and yet willing to help the stranger with

the little water in a vessel,' though the morsel of bread in thine

hand' was beyond her power. Elijah's apparently selfish demand that his

wants should be looked after first was a test of her faith. Sometimes

self-denying duty is made clearly imperative on us, before we hear the

promise which, believed, will make it easy. They who have ears to hear

the command, and hearts to obey, even if it seem to strip them of all,

will soon hear the assurance that secures abundance. The barrel would

have been empty by nightfall, if the meal in it had been used for the

woman and her son. The continuance of supply depended on her obedience,

which, in its turn, depended on faith in the prophet as a messenger of

God. There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth.' The use of earthly

goods for God's service may not be rewarded with the increase of them;

but, if the barrel is not kept full of meal, the heart will be kept

full of peace, which is better. No sacrifice for God is ever thrown

away. He remains in no man's debt.

The incident has a further bearing, as an instance of a divine

benediction resting on heathendom. The synagogue at Nazareth pointed

that lesson for us. Elijah and the widow both learned that the God of

Israel is the God of all the earth, and that His prophets have a

mission to every race. The woman rebuked, by her pity and self-denying

benevolence, the prejudices of Israel; the prophet foreshadowed, by his

familiar abode with one won from idolatry to the worship of God, the

universal aspect of the Jewish religion, and its destiny to overleap

the narrow bounds of the nation. Charity and pity have no geographical

limits. Much less can the love of God and the light of His revelation

be bounded by any narrower circle than the circumference of the world.

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ELIJAH STANDING BEFORE THE LORD

And Elijah the Tishbite . . . said . . . As the Lord God of Israel

liveth, before whom I stand.'--1 KINGS xvii. 1.

This solemn and remarkable adjuration seems to have been habitual upon

Elijah's lips in the great crises of his life. We never find it used by

any but himself, and his scholar and successor, Elisha. Both of them

employ it under similar circumstances, as if unveiling the very secret

of their lives, the reason for their strength, and for their undaunted

bearing and bold fronting of all antagonism. We find four instances in

their two lives of the use of the phrase. Elijah bursts abruptly on the

stage and opens his mouth for the first time to Ahab, to proclaim the

coming of that terrible and protracted drought; and he bases his

prophecy on that great oath, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand.'

And again, when he is sent to confront Ahab once more at the close of

the period, the same mighty word comes, As the Lord of Hosts liveth,

before whom I stand, I will surely show myself unto him this day.' And

then again, Elisha, when he is brought before the three confederate

kings, who taunt, and threaten, and flatter, to try to draw smooth

things from his lips, and get his sanction to their mad warfare, turns

upon the poor creature that called himself the King of Israel with a

superb contempt that stayed itself on that same great name and tells

him, As the Lord liveth before whom I stand, were it not that I had

regard for the King of Judah, I would not look toward you or see you,'

And lastly, when the grateful Naaman seeks to change the whole

character of Elisha's miracle, and to turn it into the coarseness of a

thing done for reward, once again the temptation is brushed aside with

that solemn word, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will

receive none.'

So at every crisis where these prophets were brought full front with

hostile power; where a tremendous message was laid upon their hearts

and lips to utter; where natural strength would fail; where they were

likely to be daunted or dazzled by temptations, by either the sweetness

or the terrors of material things, these two great heroes of the Old

Covenant, out of sight the strongest men in the old Jewish history,

steady themselves by one thought,--God lives, and I am His servant.

For that phrase, before whom I stand,' obviously means chiefly whom I

serve.' It is found, for instance, in Deuteronomy, where the priest's

office is thus defined: The sons of Levi shall stand before the Lord to

minister unto Him.' And in the same way, it is used in the Queen of

Sheba's wondering exclamation to Solomon, Blessed are thy servants, and

blessed are the men that stand before thy face continually.'

So that the consciousness that they were servants of the living God was

the very secret of the power of these men. This expression, which thus

started to their lips in moments of strain and trial, lets us see into

the very inmost heart of their strength. These two great lives, which

fill so large a apace in the records of the past, and will be

remembered for ever, were braced and ennobled thus. The same grand

thought is available to brace and ennoble our little lives, that will

soon be forgotten but by a loving heart or two, and yet may be as full

of God and of God's service as those of any of the great of old. We too

may use this secret of power, The Lord liveth, before whom I stand.'

What thoughts then, which may tend to lift and invigorate our days, are

included in these words? The first is surely this--Life a constant

vision of God's presence.

How distinct and abiding must the vision of God have been, which burned

before the inward eye of the man that struck out that phrase! Wherever

I am, whatever I do, I am before Him. To my purged eye, there is the

Apocalypse of heaven, and I behold the great throne, and the solemn

ranks of ministering spirits, my fellow-servants, hearkening to the

voice of His word.' No excitement of work, no strain of effort, no

distraction of circumstances, no glitter of gold, no dazzle of earthly

brightness, dimmed that vision for these prophets. In some measure, it

was with them as it shall be perfectly with all one day, His servants

serve Him, and see His face,'--action not interrupting vision, nor

vision weakening action. To preserve thus fresh and unimpaired, amidst

strenuous work and many temptations, the clear consciousness of being

ever in the great Taskmaster's eye,' needs resolute effort and much

self-restraint. It is hard to set the Lord always before us; but it is

possible, and in the measure in which we do it, we shall not be moved.

How nobly the steadfastness and superiority to all temptations which

such a vision gives, are illustrated by the occasions, in these

prophets' lives, in which this expression came to their lips! The

servant of the Heavenly King speaks from his present intuition. As he

speaks, he sees the throne in the heavens, and the Sovereign Ruler

there, and the sight bears him up from quailing before the earthly

monarchs whom he had to beard, and in connection with whom three out of

the four instances of the use of the phrase occur. How small Ahab and

his court must have looked to eyes that were full of the undazzling

brightness of the true King of Israel, and the ordered ranks of His

attendants! How little the greatness! How tawdry the pomp! How impotent

the power, and how toothless the threats! The poor show of the earthly

king paled before that awful vision, as a dim candle will show black

against the sun. I stand before the living God, and thou, O Ahab! art

but a shadow and a noise.' Just as we may have looked upon some

mountain scene, where all the highest summits were wrapt in mist, and

the lower hills looked mighty and majestic, until some puff of wind

came and rolled up the curtain that had shrined and hidden the icy

pinnacles and peaks that were higher up. And as that solemn white

apocalypse rose and towered to the heavens, we forgot all about the

green hills below, because our eyes beheld the mighty summits that live

amongst the stars, and sparkle white through eternity.

My brethren, here is our defence against being led away by the gauds

and shows of earth's vulgar attractions, or being terrified by the poor

terrors of its enmity. Go with that talisman in your hand, The Lord

liveth, before whom I stand,' and everything else dwindles down into

nothingness, and you are a free man, master and lord of all things,

because you are God's servants, seeing all things aright, because you

see them all in God, and God in them all.

Still further, we may say that this phrase is the utterance and

expression of a consciousness that life was echoing with the voice of

the divine command. Elijah stands before the Lord, not only feeling in

his thrilling spirit that God is ever near him, but also that His word

is ever coming forth to him, with imperative authority. That is the

prophet's conception of life. Wherever he is, he hears a voice saying,

This is the way, walk ye in it.' Every place where he stands is as the

very holy place of the oracles of the Most High, the spot in the

innermost shrine where the voice of God is audible, All circumstances

are the voice of God, commanding or restraining. He is evermore

pursued, nay, rather upheld and guided, by an all-embracing law. That

law is no mere utterance of cold impersonal duty,--a thought which may

make men slaves, but never makes them good. But it is the voice of the

living God, loving and beloved, whose tender care for His children

modulates His tone, while He commands them for their good. He speaks

because He loves; His law is life. The heart that hears Him speak is

filled with music.

Ahab and Jehoram, and all the kings of the earth, may thunder and

lighten, may threaten and flatter, may command and forbid, as they

list. They and their words are nought to him whose trembling ears have

heard, and whose obedient heart has received, a higher command, and to

whom, across the storm,' comes the deeper voice of the one true

Commander, whom alone it is a glory absolutely to obey, even the Lord,

before whom I stand.' People talk about the consciousness of a

mission.' The important point, on the settling of which depends the

whole character of our lives, is--Who do you suppose gave you your

mission'? Was it any person at all? or have you any consciousness that

any will but your own has anything to say about your life? These

prophets had found One whom it was worth while to obey, whatever came

of it, and whoever stood in the way. May it be so with you and me, my

friend! Let us try always to feel that in the commonest things we may

hear the command of God; that the trifles of each day--trifles though

they be--vibrate and sound with the reverberation of His great voice;

that in all the outward circumstances of our lives, as in all the deep

recesses of our hearts, we may trace the indications and rudiments of

His will concerning us, which He has perfectly given us in that Gospel

which is the law of liberty,' and in Him who is the Gospel and the

perfect Law. Then quietly, without bluster or mock-heroics, or making a

fuss about our independence, we can put all other commands and

commanders in their right place, with the old words, With me it is a

very small matter to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; He that

judgeth me,' and He that commandeth me, is the Lord,' In answer to all

the noise about us we can face round like Elijah, and say, As the Lord

liveth, before whom I stand.' He is my Imperator,' the Autocrat and

Commander of my life; and Him, and Him only, must I serve. What

calmness, what dignity that would put into our lives! The never-ceasing

boom of the great ocean, as it breaks on the beach, drowns all smaller

sounds. Those lives are noble and great in which that deep voice is

ever dominant, sounding on through all lesser voices, and day and night

filling the soul with command and awe.

Then, still further, we may take another view of these words. They are

the utterance of a man to whom his life was not only bright with the

radiance of a divine presence, and musical with the voice of a divine

command, but was also, on his part, full of conscious obedience. No man

could say such a thing of himself who did not feel that he was

rendering a real, earnest, though imperfect obedience to God. So,

though in one view the words express a very lowly sense of absolute

submission before God, in another view they make a lofty claim for the

utterer. He professes that he stands before the Lord, girt for His

service, watching to be guided by His eye, and ready to run when He

bids. It is the same lofty sense of communion and consecration, issuing

in authority over others, which Elijah's true brother in later days,

Paul the Apostle, put forth when he made known to his companions in

shipwreck the will of the God, whose I am, and whom I serve.' We may

well shrink from making that claim for ourselves, when we think of the

poor, perfunctory service and partial consecration which our lives

show. But let us rejoice that even we may venture to say, Truly I am

Thy servant'; if only we, like the Psalmist, rest the confession on the

perfectness of what He has done for us, rather than on the imperfection

of what we have done for Him; and lay, as its foundation, Thou hast

loosed my bonds.' Then, though we must ever feel how poor our service,

and how unprofitable ourselves, how little we deserve the honour, and

how impossible that we should ever earn the least mite of wages; yet we

may, in all lowliness, think of ourselves as set free that we may

serve, and lift our eyes, as the eyes of a servant turn towards his

master, to the living Lord, before whom we stand.

Such a life is necessarily a happy life. The one misery of man is

self-will, the one secret of blessedness is the conquest over our own

wills. To yield them up to God is rest and peace. If we stand before

God,' then that means that our wills are brought into harmony with His.

And that means that the one poison drop is squeezed out of our lives,

and that sweetness and joy are infused into them. For what disturbs us

in this world is not trouble' but our opposition to trouble. The true

source of all that frets and irritates, and wears away our lives, is

not in external things, but in the resistance of our wills to the will

of God expressed by external things. I suppose that we shall never here

bring these wills of ours into perfect correspondence with His, any

more than we shall ever, with our shaking hands and blunt pencils, draw

a perfectly straight line. But if will and heart are brought even to a

rude approach to parallelism with His, if we accept His voice when He

takes away, and obey it when He commands, we shall be quiet and

peaceful. We shall be strong and unwearied, freed from corroding cares

and exhausting rebellions, which take far more out of a man than any

work does. Thy word was found, and I did eat it.' When we thus take

God's command into our spirits, and feed upon it with will and

understanding, it becomes, as the Psalmist found it, the joy and

rejoicing of our hearts.' Elijah-like, we shall go in the strength of

that meat many days.' The secret of power and of calm is--yield your

will to the loving Lord, and stand ever before Him with, Here am I,

send me!'

We may add one more remark to these various views of the significance

of this expression, to which the last instance of its use may help us.

Here it is: And Naaman said, I pray thee, take a blessing of thy

servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will

receive none.'

The thought, which made all Elisha's life bright with the light of

God's presence, which filled his ear with the unremitting voice of a

Divine Law, which swayed and bowed his will to joyful obedience,

chilled and deadened his desires for all earthly rewards. I am not thy

servant. I am God's servant. It is not your business to pay my wages. I

cannot dishonour my Master by taking payment from thee for doing His

work. I look for everything from Him, for nothing from thee.'

And is there not a broad general truth involved there, namely, that

such a life as we have been describing will find its sole reward where

it finds its inspiration and its law? The Master's approval is the

servant's best wages. If we truly feel that the Lord liveth, before

whom we stand, we shall want nothing else for our work but His smile,

and we shall feel that the light of His face is all that we need. That

thought should deaden our love for outward things. How little we need

to care about any payment that the world can give for anything we do!

If we feel, as we ought, that we are God's servants, that will lift us

clear above the low aims and desires which meet us. How little we shall

care for money, for men's praise, for getting on in the world! How the

things that we fever our souls by pursuing, and fret our hearts when we

lose, will cease to attract! How small and vulgar the prizes' of life,

as people call them, will appear! The Lord liveth, before whom I

stand,' should be enough for us, and instead of all these motives to

action drawn from the rewards of this world, we ought to labour that,

whether present or absent, we may be well-pleasing to Him.'

Not the fading leaves of the victor's wreath, laurel though they be,

nor the corruptible things as silver and gold, whereof earth's diadems

and rewards are fashioned, but the incorruptible crown that fadeth not

away, which His hand will give, should fire our hope, and shine before

our faith. Not Naaman's gifts but God's approval is Elisha's reward.

Not the praise from lips that will perish, or the hollow wraith of

dying fame,' but Christ's Well done! good and faithful servant,' should

be a Christian's aim.

May we, brethren, possess the spirit and the power of Elias';--the

spirit, in that we know ourselves to be the servants of the living God;

and then we shall have some measure of his dauntless power and heroic

unworldliness!

Still better, may we have the Spirit of Him who was the Servant of the

Lord,' diviner in His gentle meekness than the fiery prophet in his

lonely strength! Make yours the mind that was in Christ, that you too

may say, Lo, I come! in the volume of the book it is written of me, I

delight to do Thy will, yea, Thy law is within my heart.'

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OBADIAH

To the Young

. . . I thy servant fear the Lord from my youth.'--1 KINGS xviii. 12.

This Obadiah is one of the obscurer figures in the Old Testament. We

never hear of him again, for there is no reason to accept the Jewish

tradition which alleges that he was Obadiah the prophet. And yet how

distinctly he stands out from the canvas, though he is only sketched

with a few bold outlines! He is the governor over Ahab's house,' a kind

of mayor of the palace, and probably the second man in the kingdom. But

though thus high in that idolatrous and self-willed court, he has

bravely kept true to the ancient faith. Neither Jezebel's flatteries

nor her frowns have moved him. But there, amid apostasy and idolatry he

stands, probably all alone in the court, a worshipper of Jehovah. His

name is his character, for it means servant of Jehovah.' It was not a

light thing to be a worshipper of the God of Israel in Ahab's court.

The feminine rage of the fierce Sidonian woman, whom Ahab obeyed in

most things, burned hot against the enemies of her father's gods, and

hotter, perhaps, against any one who thwarted her imperious will.

Obadiah did both, in that audacious piece of benevolence when he

sheltered the Lord's prophets--one hundred of them--and saved them from

her cruel search. The writer of the book very rightly marks this brave

antagonism to the outburst of the queen's wrath as a signal proof of a

more than ordinary devotion to the worship and fear of Jehovah. His

firmness and his religion did not prevent his retaining his place of

honour and dignity. That says something for Ahab, and more perhaps for

Obadiah.

Most of you believe that you ought to fear the Lord': but you are apt

to put off, and so I wish to urge on you that you should give your

hearts to Jesus Christ at once.

I. The blessedness of youthful religion.

(a) It guards from many temptations, and keeps a character innocent of

much transgression.

Think of the dangers that lie thick in the streets of every great city,

and of a lad coming up from a country home of godliness, where he was

surrounded by a mother's love and an atmosphere of purity, and launched

into some lonely lodging, or some factory or warehouse with many

tempters. Nothing will be such a help to resistance and victory as to

be able to say, So did not I because of the fear of the Lord.'

(b) It will save from remorse. Even if a man sobers down' after sowing

his wild oats,' which is a very problematical if,' what bitter memories

of wasted days, what polluting memories of filthy ones, will haunt him!

And if he does not sober down, what then?

It is folly to begin life on a wrong tack, in regard to which the best

that you can say is that you do not mean to continue it. If you do not,

then the wise thing is to get at once on to the road on which you do

mean to continue, and to save the weary work of retracing steps and the

painful consciousness of having made a false start. Are you so sure

that you will wish, or that it will be possible, to face right about

and get on to a new line? Fishermen catch lobsters and the like by

means of baskets with one opening, the withes of which are so set that

the entrance is easy, but that a ring of sharp points oppose all

attempts at turning back and getting out. The world lays pots' of that

sort, and many a young man and woman glides smoothly in, and finds it

impossible to get out.

(c) It usually leads to a deeper and more peaceful and harmonious

religion than is attained by those who have given the world the better

part of their days, and have only the last fragment of them to give to

God. Obadiah had feared God from his youth, and that had a good deal to

do with his brave stand against Jezebel. It is a grand thing to enlist

habit on the side of godliness.

II. The foes of youthful religion.

There are foes within . . .. the strong self-reliance and bounding life

proper to youth, without which at the opening of the flower, the bloom

would be poor and the fruit little, . . . the power of appeals to the

unjaded and physically strong senses, . . . the difficulty at such a

stage of life of looking forward and soberly regarding the end.

There are foes without . . ..the crowds of tempters of both sexes, men

and women who take a devilish pleasure in polluting innocent minds,

. . . the companions whose jeers are worse to face than a battery,

. . . the inconsistencies of so-called Christians, the anti-Christian

literature which is peculiarly fascinating to the young, with its brave

show of breaking with mouldy tradition and enthroning reason and

emancipating from rusty fetters.

III. The too probable alternative to youthful religion.

It is but too likely that, if a man does not fear the Lord' from his

youth,' he will never fear Him. Thank God, there is no time nor

condition of life in which the wicked man cannot forsake his way,' or

the unrighteous man his thoughts,' and turn to the Lord' with the

assurance that He will abundantly pardon.' But it is sadly too plain to

observation, and to the experience of some of us, that obstacles grow

with years, that habits and associations grip with increasing power,

that in all things our natures become less flexible, the supple sapling

becoming gnarled and tough, that a middle-aged or old man is more

inextricably tied and bound by the cords of his sins,' than a young one

is.

Sin lies to us by first saying, It is too soon to be religious,' and

then it lies to us by saying, It is too late.'

The inclination diminishes.

The Gospel long heard and long put aside, loses power.

Contrast the beauty of a course of life, begun on the same lines as

those on which it ends, and being like the shining light, that shineth

more and more unto the meridian of the day,' with one which gave the

greater part of its years to the world, the flesh, and the devil,' or

at least to one's godless self, and the dregs of it only to God.

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THE TRIAL BY FIRE

And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose yon one bullock for

yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name

of your gods, but put no fire under. 26. And they took the bullock

which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of

Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there

was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar

which was made. 27. And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked

them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he Is talking, or he

is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and

must be awaked. 28. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after

their manner with knives and lancets, till the blood gushed out upon

them. 29. And it came to pass, when midday was passed, and they

prophesied until the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice,

that there was neither voice, nor any to answer, nor any that regarded.

30. And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the

people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that

was broken down. 31. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the

number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of the

Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name: 32. And with the stones he

built an altar in the name of the Lord: and he made a trench about the

altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33. And he put

the wood in order, and cut the bullock in nieces, and laid him on the

wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water, and pour it on the burnt

sacrifice, and on the wood. 34. And he said, Do it the second time. And

they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time. And

they did it the third time. 35. And the water ran round about the

altar; and he filled the trench also with water. 36. And it came to

pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah

the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and of

Israel, let it be known this day that Thou art God in Israel, and that

I am Thy servant, and that I have done all these things at Thy word.

37. Hear me, O Lord, hear me: that this people may know that Thou art

the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their heart back again. 38.

Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and

the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that

was in the trench. 39. And when all the people saw it, they fell on

their faces: and they said, The Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is

the God.'--1 KINGS xviii. 25-39.

The place, the purpose, and the actors in this scene, make it among the

grandest in history. A nation, with its king, has come together, at the

bidding of one man, to settle no less a question than whom they shall

worship. There, on the slope of Carmel, with the brassy heaven gleaming

hard and dry above them, and the yellow, burnt-up plain of Jezreel at

their feet, the expectant people stand. The assembly was a singular

proof of Elijah's ascendency; for Ahab's bluster had sunk, cowed in his

presence, and he had meekly done the prophet's bidding in summoning all

Israel' and the eight hundred and fifty Baal and Asherah prophets, for

an unexplained purpose. The false priests would come unwillingly; but

they came.

Then Elijah takes the command, and, though utterly alone, towers above

the crowd in the courage of his undaunted confidence in his message.

His words have the ring of authority as he rebukes indecision, and

calls for a clear adhesion to Baal or Jehovah. If the people had

answered, the trial by fire would have been needless. But their silence

shows that they waver, and therefore he makes his proposal to them.

Note that the priests are not consulted, nor is Ahab. The former would

have had some excuse for shirking the sharp issue; but the people's

assent forced them to accept the ordeal,--reluctantly enough, no doubt.

I. The vain cries to a deaf God. It is strange that one of the parties

to the test has power to determine its conditions, especially as

Elijah's prophetic authority was one of the things in dispute; but it

is a sign of the magnetic power which one bold man with absolute

confidence in his own convictions exercises over men. The Baal prophets

are given every advantage in priority of action. Error is best unmasked

by being allowed free opportunity to do its best; for the more

favourable the circumstances of trial, the more signal the defeat.

God's servants must never be suspected of unfair tricks in their

controversy with error. They can afford to let it try first. Notice the

substitution of your god,' in the Revised Version, for your gods' in

the Authorised Version. That is obviously right; for the only question

was about one god,--namely, Baal.

So, in the early morning, with all the people gazing at them, the Baal

priests or prophets begin their attempt. It was easy to prepare the

sacrifice, and lay it on the altar,--though, no doubt, it was done

sullenly, with foreboding of the coming exposure. The whole account of

the wild invocations of the priests may suggest some of the

characteristics of idolatry, and touch our hearts with pity, as well as

with the sense of its absurdity, which animated Elijah's mockery.

Note, then, the vivid picture, in verse 27, of the long hours of vain

crying. On the one hand, we hear the wild chorus echoing among the

rocks; on the other, we feel the dead silence in the heavens.

The monotonous and almost mechanical repetition of the invocation,

prolonged till the syllables have no meaning to the yelling crowd, is

characteristic of the frenzied excitement so common in idolatry. To

call such howlings prayer, degrades the name. They are the very

opposite of that sacred communion of a believing soul with the God whom

it knows, trusts, and beseeches with submission. Neither knowledge nor

trust is in these shrieks, which seek to propitiate the stern god by

repeating his name as a kind of charm. Heathenism has no true prayer.

Wild cries and passionate desires, flung upwards to an unloved god, are

not prayer; and that solace and anchor of the troubled soul is wanting

in all the dreary lands given up to idolatry.

The melancholy persistence of the unanswered cries may stand as a

symbol of the tragic obstinacy with which their devotees cling to their

vain gods,--a rebuke to us with a more enlightened faith. The silence,

which was the only answer, is put in strong contrast with the

continuous roar of the four hundred and fifty,--so long and loud the

hoarse cries here, so unmoved the stillness in the careless heaven.

That, too, is typical of heathenism, which is sad with unavailing cries

and ignorant of answers to any. As the day wore on, and the voices grew

hoarse, and hope declined, more violent bodily exercise was resorted

to, and the shouting crowd danced (or, perhaps, as the margin says,

limped,'--a picturesque and contemptuous word for the grotesque

contortions around the altar), as if that might bring the answer. That

again is a feature common to all heathenism. No wonder that Elijah's

scorn broke forth vehemently at such a sight. Noon was the hour of the

sun's greatest power, and, since Baal was probably a solar deity, it

was the hour when, if ever, he would spare one of his abundant fiery

beams to light the pyre. So Elijah's taunts came just when they were

most biting, and none can say that they were undeserved. His fiery zeal

and his naturally stern character broke out in the bitter irony with

which he imagines a variety of undignified positions for Baal.

Sarcasm is not the highest weapon, and the spirit of Elijah' is not the

spirit of Jesus; but the exposure of the absurdity of idolatry is

legitimate, and even ridicule may have its place in pricking

wind-distended bladders. A man throttling a serpent may be excused

using anything that comes handy for the purpose. But, at the same time,

the right attitude for us as Christians in the presence of that awful

fact of idolatry, is neither contempt nor scientific curiosity, but

pity deep as Christ's, and earnest resolve to help our darkened

brethren. The taunts stirred to fiercer excitement and more extravagant

acts, as ridicule is wont to do, and therein proves itself an

unreliable instrument of controversy. Laughing at a man generally makes

him more obstinate. The priests answered Elijah by savagely gashing

their half-naked bodies with knives and lances,--a ready way to make

blood come, but not to bring fire. The frenzy became wilder as the day

declined, and at last, covered with blood, hoarse with shouting,

panting with their gymnastics, they prophesied,' having wrought

themselves into that state of excitement in which incoherent rhapsodies

burst from their lips. What a scene to call worship! That is what

millions of men are ready to practise to-day. And all the while there

is no voice, no answer, no care for them, in the pitiless sky. The very

genius of idolatry is set before us in that tumultuous crowd on Carmel.

II. The sacrifice of faith and the answer by fire. We pass from a scene

of wild commotion into an atmosphere of sacred calm in verse 30. The

contrast is striking. The fiery fervours of the day are past, and the

sun is sinking behind the top of Carmel, and there is much to do before

it sets. Elijah with his own hands, as would appear, repairs a ruined

altar among the woods. Probably it had been erected for secret worship

of Jehovah by some faithful amid the national apostasy, when access to

Jerusalem was forbidden them, and had been destroyed by Ahab in his

crusade against Jehovah worshippers. The selection of the twelve stones

was symbolical of the unbroken unity of the nation, and was Elijah's

protest against the very existence of the Northern kingdom, and its

assumption of the name of Israel' The writer explains what was meant,

when he reminds us that Israel was the name given to Jacob, and

therefore, as he would have us infer, was the common property of all

his descendants. Judah was a part of Israel, and Israel should be an

undivided whole, uniting in all its tribes in bringing offerings to

Jehovah.

It was a daring thing to do before Ahab's face; but the weak king was,

for the time, subjugated by the imperious will and courage of Elijah.

The building of the altar, with its mute witness to God's purpose,

would touch some hearts in the gazing, silent crowd. The next step was,

of course, meant to make the miracle more conspicuous by drenching

everything with water, probably brought, even in that drought, from the

perennial fountain near at hand. Perhaps, too, the number of barrels

was intended, again, as symbolical of the twelve tribes.

One can fancy the wonder and eagerness of the people, and the dark

frowns of the baffled and exhausted Baal priests, as they gradually

came out of their frenzy, and knew that they had lost their

opportunity. The tranquil though earnest prayer of the prophet is in

sharpest contrast with the meaningless bellowings to Baal. Note in it

the solemn invocation. The great Name, which all listening to him had

deposed from rule over them, is set in the front; and the ancestral

worship, as well as the divine gifts and dealings with the patriarchs,

is pleaded with God as the reason for His answer now. The name of

Israel' instead of the more common Jacob,' has the same force as in

verse 31.

Note the substance of the petitions. The deepest desire of a truly

devout soul is that God would make His name known. Zeal for God's

honour and love for men who have gone astray from Him, conspire to make

that the head and front of His true servant's prayers. It is God, not

his own credit, about which Elijah thinks first. For himself, all that

he desires is to be known as an obedient servant, and as not having

done anything at the bidding of his own will or judgment, but in

accordance with the all-commanding Voice.

Clearly we must suppose that in all the ordering of this sublime trial

by fire, Elijah had been acting at Thy word,' even though we have no

other record of the fact. He had no right to expect an answer unless he

had been bidden to propose the test. God will honour the drafts which

He bids us draw on Him; but to suspend our own or other people's faith

in Him, on the issue of some experiment whether He will answer prayers,

is not faith, but rash presumption, unless it is in obedience to a

distinct command. Elijah had such a command, and therefore he could ask

God to vindicate his action, and to prove that he was God's servant.

His last petition is beautiful, both in its consciousness of power with

God and recognition of his place as a prophet, and in its lowly

subordination of all personal aims to the restoration of Israel to the

true worship. He asks, with reiteration which is earnestness and faith,

and therefore the sharpest contrast to the mechanical repetition by

Baal's priests, that God would hear him; but his sole object in that

prayer is, not that his name may be exalted as a prophet, or that any

good may come to him, but that the blinded eyes may be opened, and the

hearts, that have been so sadly led astray, be brought back to the

worship of their fathers' God.

The whole brief prayer, in its calm confidence; its adoring recognition

of the name and past dealings of Jehovah as the ground of trust; its

throbbing of earnest desire for the manifestation of His character

before men; its consciousness of personal relation to God, which

humbles rather than puffs up; its beseeching for an answer, and its

closing petition, which comes round again to its first, that men may

know God, and fasten their hearts on Him,--may well stand as a pattern

of prayer for us.

The short prayer of faith does in a moment what all the long day of

crying could not do. The language in which the answer is described

emulates the rapidity of the swift tongues of fire which licked up

sacrifice, altar, and water. They were the tokens of acceptance,

reminding of the consuming of the first sacrifices in the Tabernacle,

and, like them, inaugurating a new beginning of the worship of God. The

burning of the altar, as well as of the sacrifice, expressed the

acceptance of the people whom it, by its twelve stones, symbolised. And

the people, on their part, were--for the time, at all events--swept

away by the miracle, and by the force of the prophet's example and

authority. Short-lived their faith may have been, as certainly it was

superficial; but the fire had for the time melted their hearts, and set

them flowing in the ancient channels of devotion. The faith that is

founded on miracle may be deepened into something better; but unless it

is, it speedily dies away. The faith that is due to the influence of

some strong personality may lead on to an independent faith, based on

personal experience; but, unless it does, it too will perish.

We may find a modern reproduction of the test of Carmel in the

impotence of all other schemes and methods of social and spiritual

reformation and the power of the Gospel. In it and its effects God

answers by fire. Let the opposers, who are so glib in demonstrating the

failure of Christianity, do the same with their enchantments, if they

can.

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ELIJAH'S WEAKNESS, AND ITS CUBE

And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had

slain all the prophets with the sword. 2. Then Jezebel sent a messenger

unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make

not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time.

3. And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to

Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. 4. But

he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat

down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might

die; and said, It is enough: now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am

not better than my fathers. 5. And as he lay and slept under a juniper

tree, behold, then, an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and

eat. 6. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the

coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and

laid him down again. 7. And the angel of the Lord came again the second

time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat; because the journey is

too great for thee. 8. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in

the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the

mount of God. 9. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there,

and, behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said unto him,

What doest thou here, Elijah? 10. And he said, I have been very jealous

for the Lord God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken Thy

covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the

sword; and I, even I only, am left: and they seek my life, to take it

away. 11. And He said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the

Lord. And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent

the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the

Lord was not In the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the

Lord was not in the earthquake: 12. And after the earthquake a fire,

but the Lord was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small

voice. 13. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his

face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the

cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him and said, What doest

then here, Elijah! 14. And he said, I have been very jealous for the

Lord God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy

covenant, thrown down Thine altars, and slain Thy prophets with the

sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it

away. 15. And the Lord said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the

wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king

over Syria: 16. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king

over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou

anoint to be prophet in thy room. 17. And it shall come to pass, that

him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that

escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. 18. Yet I have left

me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto

Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him.'--1 KINGS xix. 1-18.

The miracle on Carmel cowed, if it did not convince, Ahab, so that he

did not oppose the slaughter of the Baal prophets; but Jezebel was made

of sterner stuff, and her passionate idolatry was proof against even a

sign from heaven. Obstinacy in error is often a rebuke to tremulous

faith in God. She fiercely puts her back to the wall, and defies Elijah

and his God. Her threat to the prophet has a certain audacity of

frankness almost approaching generosity. She will give her victim fair

play. This woman is magnificent in sin.' The Septuagint prefixes to her

oath, As surely as thou art Elijah and I Jezebel,' which adds force to

it. It also reads, by a very slight change in the Hebrew, in verse 3,

he was afraid,' for he saw,'--which is possibly right, as giving his

motive for escape more distinctly.

I. We may note, first, the prophet's flight (verses 3-8). Beersheba, on

the southern border of the kingdom of Judah, was eloquent of memories

of the patriarchs, but though it was nearly a hundred miles from

Jezreel, Jezebel's arm was long enough to reach the fugitive there, and

therefore he plunged deeper into the dreary southern desert. He left

behind him his servant, his young man,' as the original has it, whom

Rabbinical tradition identified with the miraculously resuscitated son

of the widow of Zarephath, and supposed to become afterwards the

prophet Jonah. Thus alone but for the company of his own gloomy

thoughts, and wearied with toilsome travel in the sun-smitten waste, he

took shelter under the shadow of a solitary shrub (the Hebrew

emphatically calls it one juniper,' or rather broom-plant'), and there

the waves of depression went over him.

His complaint is not to be wondered at, though it was wrong. The very

overstrain of the scene on Carmel brought reaction. The height of the

crest of one wave measures the depth of the trough of the next, and no

mortal spirit can keep itself at the sublime elevation reached by

Elijah when alone he fronted and converted a nation. The supposed

necessity for flight, coming so immediately after apparent victory,

showed him how hollow the change in the people was. What had become of

all the fervency of their shout, The Lord, He is the God!' if they

could leave Jezebel the power to carry out her threat? Solitude and the

awful desert increased his gloom. The strong man had become weak, and

it was ebb-tide with him. His prayer was petulant, impatient,

presumptuous. What right had he to settle what was enough'? If he

really wished to die, he could have found death at Jezreel, and had no

need to travel a hundred miles to seek a grave. He was weary of his

work, and profoundly disappointed by what he hastily concluded was its

failure, and in a fit of faithless despondency he forgot reverence,

submission, and obedience.

If Elijah can become weak, and his courage die out, and his zeal become

torpid apathy and cowardly wish to shuffle off responsibility and shirk

work, who shall stand? The lessons of self-distrust, of the nearness to

one another of the most opposite emotions in our weak natures, of the

depth of gloom into which the boldest and brightest servant of God may

fall as soon as he loses hold of God's hand, never had a more striking

instance to point them than that mighty prophet, sitting huddled

together in utter despondency below the solitary retem bush, praying

his foolish prayer for death.

The meal to which an angel twice waked him was God's answer to his

prayer, telling him both that his life was still needful and that God

cared for him. Perhaps one of Elijah's reasons for taking to the desert

was the thought that he might starve there, and so find death. At all

events, God for the third time miraculously provides his food. The

ravens, the widow of Zarephath, an angel, were his caterers; and,

instead of taking away his life, God Himself sends the bread and water

to preserve it. The revelation of a watchful, tender Providence often

rebukes gloomy unbelief and shames us back to faith. We are not told

whether the journey to Horeb was commanded, or, like the flight from

Jezreel, was Elijah's own doing; but, in any case, he must have

wandered in the desert, to have taken forty days to reach it.

II. The second stage is the vision at Horeb (verses 9-14). The history

of Israel has never touched Horeb since Moses left it, and it is not

without significance that we are once more on that sacred ground. The

parallel between Moses and Elijah is very real. These two names stand

out above all others in the history of the theocracy, the one as its

founder, the other as its restorer; both distinguished by special

revelations, both endowed with exceptional force of character and power

of the Spirit; the one the lawgiver, the other the head of the

prophetic order; both having something peculiar in their departure, and

both standing together, in witness of their supremacy in the past, and

of their inferiority in the future, by Jesus on the Mount of

Transfiguration. The associations of the place are marked by the use of

the definite article, which is missed in the Authorised Version,--the

cave,' that same cleft in the rock where Moses had stood. Note, too,

that the word rendered lodged' is literally passed the night,' and that

therefore we may suppose that the vision came to Elijah in the

darkness.

That question, What doest thou here?' can scarcely be freed from a tone

of rebuke; but, like Christ's to the travellers to Emmaus, and many

another interrogation from God, it is also put in order to allow of the

loaded heart's relieving itself by pouring out all its griefs. God's

questions are the assurance of His listening ear and sympathising

heart. This one is like a little key which opens a great sluice. Out

gushes a full stream. His forty days' solitude have done little for

him. A true answer would have been, I was afraid of Jezebel.' He takes

credit for zeal, and seems to insinuate that he had been more zealous

for God than God had been for Himself. He forgets the national

acknowledgment of Jehovah at Carmel, and the hundred prophets protected

by good Obadiah. Despondency has the knack of picking its facts. It is

colour-blind, and can only see dark tints. He accuses his countrymen,

as if he would stir up God to take vengeance.

How different this weak and sinful wail over his solitude from the

heroic mention of it on Carmel, when it only nerved his courage I

(verse 22). The divine manifestation which followed is evidently meant

to recall that granted to Moses on the same spot. The Lord passed by'

is all but verbally quoted from Exodus xxxiv. 6, and the truth that had

been proclaimed in words to Moses was enforced by symbol to Elijah. If

the vision was in the night, as verse 9 suggests, it becomes still more

impressive. The fierce wind that roared among the savage peaks, the

shock that made the mountains reel, and the flashing flames that

lighted up the wild landscape, were all phenomena of one kind, and at

once expressed God's lordship over all destructive agencies of nature,

and symbolised the more vehement and disturbing forms of energy, used

by Him for the furtherance of His purposes in the field of history or

of revelation. Elijah's ministry was of such a sort, and he had now to

learn the limitations of his work, and the superiority of another type,

represented by the sound of gentle stillness.'

It is the same lesson which Moses learned there, when he heard that the

Lord is a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and

plenteous in mercy and truth.' It was exemplified in the gentle Elisha,

the successor of Elijah. It reached far beyond the time then present,

and was indeed a Messianic prophecy, declaring the inmost character of

Him in whom the Lord is,' in an altogether special sense. Elijah as a

prophet brought no new knowledge, and uttered no far-reaching

predictions; but he received one of the deepest and clearest prophecies

of the gentleness of God's highest Messenger, and on Horeb saw afar off

what he saw fulfilled on the Mountain of Transfiguration. Nor is his

vision exhausted by its Messianic reference. It contains an eternal

truth for all God's servants. Storm, earthquake, and fire may be God's

precursors, and needed sometimes to prepare His way; but gentleness is

the habitation of His throne,' and they serve Him best, and are nearest

Him whom they serve, who are meek in heart and gentle among enemies, as

a nurse cherisheth her children.' Love is the victor, and the sharpest

weapons of the Christian are love and lowliness.

The lesson was not at first grasped by Elijah, as his repetition of his

complaint, word for word, with almost dogged obstinacy, shows. The best

of us are slow to learn God's lessons, and a habit of faithless gloom

is not soon overcome. It is much easier to get down into the pit than

to struggle out of it.

III. The commission for further service, which closes the scene, is a

further rebuke to the prophet. He is bidden to retrace his way and to

take refuge in the desert lying to the south and east of Damascus,

where he would be safe from Jezebel, and still not far from the scene

of his activity. The instructions given to anoint a king of Syria and

one of Israel were not fulfilled by Elijah, but by his successor; and

we have to suppose that further commands were given to him on that

subject. The third injunction, to anoint his successor, was obeyed at

once on his journey, though Ahelmeholah, on Gilboa, was dangerously

near Jezreel. The designation of these future instruments of God's

purpose was at once a sign to Elijah that his own task was drawing to a

close (having reached its climax on Carmel), and that God had great

designs beyond him and his service. The true conception of our work is

that we sire only links in a chain, and that we can be done without.

God removes the workers and carries on the work.' To anoint our

successor is often a bitter pill; but self-importance needs to be taken

down, and it is blessed to lose ourselves in gazing into the future of

God's work, when we are gone from the field.

Further, the commissions met Elijah's despondency in another way; for

they assured him of the divine judgments on the house of Ahab, and of

the use of the Syrian king as a rod to chastise Israel. He had thought

God too slow in avenging His dishonoured name, and had been taught the

might of gentleness; but now he also learns the certainty of

punishment, while the enigmatical promise that Elisha should slay'

those who escaped the swords of Hazael and Jehu dimly points to the

merciful energy of that prophet's word, his only sword, which shall

slay but to revive, and wound to heal. I have hewed them by the . . .

words of my mouth.'

Finally, the revelation of the seven thousand--a round number, which

expresses the sacredness as well as the numerousness of the elect,

hidden ones--rebukes the hasty assumption of his being left alone,

faithful among the faithless.' God has more servants than we know of.

Let us beware of feeding either our self-righteousness or our

narrowness or our faint-heartedness with the fancy that we have a

monopoly of faithfulness, or are left alone to witness for God.

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PUTTING ON THE ARMOUR

And the king of Israel answered and said. Tell him. Let not him that

girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.'--1

KINGS xx. 11.

For the Young.

Ahab, King of Israel, was but a poor creature, and, like most weak

characters, he turned out a wicked one, because he found that there

were more temptations to do wrong than inducements to do right. Like

other weak people, too, he was torn asunder by the influence of

stronger wills. On the one side he had a termagant of a wife, stirring

him up to idolatry and all evil, and on the other side Elijah

thundering and lightning at him; so the poor man was often reduced to

perplexity. Once in his lifetime he did behave like a king, with some

flash of dignity. My text comes from that incident. His next neighbour,

and, consequently, his continual enemy, was the king of Damascus. He

had made a raid across the border and was dictating terms so severe as

to invite even Ahab to courageous opposition. His back was at the wall,

and he mustered up courage to say No!' That provoked a bit of

blustering bravado from the enemy, who sent back a message, The gods do

also unto me and more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for

handfuls for all the people that follow me.' And then Ahab replied in

the words of our text. They have a dash of contempt and sarcasm, all

the more galling because of their unanswerable common-sense. The time

to crow and clap your wings is after you have fought. Samaria is not a

heap of dust just yet. Threatened men live long.' The battle began, and

the bully was beaten; and for once Ahab tasted the sweets of success.

Now, I have nothing more to do with Ahab and the immediate application

of his message, but I wish to apply it to my young friends, whom I have

taken it upon me to ask now to listen to two or three homely words to

them in this sermon.

You are beginning the fight; some of us old people are getting very

near the end of it. And I would fain, if I could, see successors coming

to take the places which we shall soon have to vacate. So my message to

you, dear friends, young men and young women, is this, Let not him that

putteth on the harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.'

I. Now, look for a moment at the general view of life that is implied

in this saying thus understood.

There is nothing that the bulk of people are more unwilling to do than

steadily to think about what life as a whole, and in its deepest

aspects, is. And that disinclination is strong, as I suppose, in the

average young man or young woman. That comes, plainly enough, from the

very blessings of your stage of life. Unworn health, a blessed

inexperience of failures and limitations, the sense of undeveloped

power within you, the natural buoyancy of early days, all tend to make

you rather live by impulse than by reflection. And I should be the last

man in the world to try to damp the noble, buoyant, beautiful

enthusiasms with which Nature has provided that we should all begin our

course. The world will do that soon enough; and there is no sadder

sight than that of a bitter old man, who has outlived, and smiles

sardonically at, his youthful dreams. But I do wish to press upon you

all this question, Have you ever tried to think to yourself, Now what,

after all, is this life that is budding within me and dawning before

me--what is it, in its deepest reality, and what am I to do with it?'

There are some of us to whom, so far as we have thought at all, life

presents itself mainly as a shop, a place where we are to buy and sell,

and get gain,' and use our evenings, after the day's work is over, for

such recreation as suits us. And there are young men among my hearers

who, with the flush of their physical manhood upon them, and perhaps

away from the restraints of home, and living in gloomy town lodgings,

with no one to look after them, are beginning to think that life after

all is a kind of pigs' trough, with plenty of foul wash in it for whoso

chooses to suck it up--a garden of not altogether pure delights, a

place where a man may gratify the lusts of the flesh.'

But, dear brethren, whilst there are many other noble metaphors under

which we can set forth the essential character of this mysterious,

tremendous life of ours, I do not know that there is one that ought to

appeal more to the slumbering heroism which lies in every human soul,

and to the enthusiasms which, unless you in your youth cherish, you

will in your manhood be beggared indeed, than that which this picture

of my text suggests. After all, life is meant to be one long conflict.

We are like the fellahin that one sometimes sees in Eastern lands, who

cannot go out to plough in their fields, or reap their harvests,

without a gun slung on their backs; for the condition under which we

work in this world is that everything worth doing has to be done at the

cost of opposition and antagonism, and that no noble service or

building is possible without brave, continuous conflict. Even upon the

lower levels of life that is so. No man learns a science or a trade

without having to fight for it. But high above these lower levels,

there is the one on which we all are called to walk, the high level of

duty, and no man does what his conscience tells him, or refrains from

that which his conscience sternly forbids, without having to fight for

it. We are in the lists and compelled to draw the sword. And if we do

not realise this, that all nobility all greatness, all wisdom, all

success, even of the lowest and most vulpine kind, are won by conflict,

we shall never do anything in the world worth doing. You are a soldier,

whether you will or no, and life is a fight, whether you recognise the

fact or not.

So, standing at the beginning, do not fancy that there is opening

before you a scene of enjoyment, or that you are stepping into a world

in which you can take your ease, and come out successfully at the other

end. It is not so; and you will find that out before long. Better that

you should settle it in your minds at first. When you were born you

were enrolled on the roll-call of the regiment; and now you have to do

a man's part in the battle.

II. Note the boastful temper which is sure to be beaten.

No doubt there is something inspiring in the spectacle of the young

warrior standing there, chafing at the lists, eagerly pulling on his

gauntlets, fitting on his helmet, and longing to be in the thick of the

fight. No doubt, as I have already said, there is something in your

early days which makes such buoyant hopes and anticipations of success

natural, and which gives you, as a great gift, that expectation of

victory. I do not wish to shatter any of your enthusiasms or ideals,

but I do wish to suggest a consideration or two that may calm and sober

them.

So I ask, have you ever estimated, are you now estimating rightly, what

it is that you have to fight for? To make yourselves pure, wise,

strong, self-governing, Christlike men, such as God would have you to

be. That is not a small thing for a man to set himself to do. You may

go into the struggle for lower purposes, for bread and cheese, or

wealth or fame, or love, or the like, with a comparatively light heart;

but if there once has dawned upon a young soul the whole majestic sweep

of possibilities in its opening life, then the battle assumes an aspect

of solemnity and greatness that silences all boasting. Have you

considered what it is that you have to fight for?

Have you considered the forces that are arrayed against you? What act

is all its thought had been?' Hand and brain are never paired. There is

always a gap between the conception and its realisation. The painter

stands before his canvas, and, while others may see beauty in it, he

only sees what a small fragment of the radiant vision that floated

before his eye his hand has been able to preserve. The author looks on

his book and thinks what a poor, wretched transcript of the thoughts

that inspired his pen it is. There is ever this same disproportion

between the conception and accomplishment. Therefore, all we old people

feel, more or less, that our lives have been failures. We set out as

you do, thinking that we were going to build a tower whose top should

reach to heaven, and we are contented if, at the last, we have

scrambled together some little wooden shanty in which we can live. We

thought as you do; you will come to think as we do. So you had better

begin now, and not go into the fight boasting, or you will come out of

it conscious of being beaten.

Have you realised how different it is to dream things and to do them?

In our dreams we are, as it were, working in vacuo. When we come to

acts, the atmosphere offers resistance. It is easy to imagine ourselves

victorious in circumstances where things are all going rightly and are

bending according to our own desires, but when we come to the grim

world, where there are things that resist and people are not plastic,

it is a very different matter. You do not yet understand, as you will

some day, the fatal limitations of power that hem us all round and the

obstinate way that circumstances have of not falling in with our

wishes. And you have not yet learned how completely and constantly

failure accompanies success, like its shadow. The old Egyptians had no

need to put a skeleton at their tables, nor the Romans to set a mocker

behind the hero as he rode in triumph up to the Capitol. The world

provides the skeleton at the banquet, and circumstances supply the

mocker to add a dash of failure to all our triumphs.

Have you ever realised how certainly, into the brightest and most

buoyant and successful lives, there will come crushing sorrows, blows

as from an unseen hand in the dark, that fell a man? O friend! when one

thinks of the miseries and the misfortunes, the sorrows and the losses,

the broken and bleeding hearts that began life buoyant, elastic,

hopeful, perhaps boasting, like you, there ought to be a sobering tint

cast over our brightest visions.

I suppose that our colleges are full of students who are going, to far

outstrip their professors, that every life-school has a dozen lads who

have just begun to handle brush and easel, and are going to put

Raffaelle in the shade. I suppose that every lawyer's office has a

budding Lord Chancellor or two in it. And I suppose that that sharp

criticism of us fumblers in the field, and half-expressed thought, How

much better I could do it!' belong to youth by virtue of its youth. It

is a crude form of undeveloped power, but it wants a great deal of

sobering down, and I am trying now to let out a little of the blood,

and to bring you to a clear conception of the very limited success

which is likely to attend you. All we old people, whose deficiencies

and limitations you see so clearly, had the same dreams, impossible as

it may appear to you, fifty years ago. We were going to be the men, and

wisdom was going to die with us, and you see what we have made of it.

You will not do much better.

Have you ever taken stock honestly of your own resources? What king,

going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and

counteth the cost, whether with his ten thousand he can meet him that

cometh against him with twenty thousand?' Boast if you like, but

calculate first, and boast after that, if you can.

Your worst enemy is yourself. When you are counting your resources and

saying, I have this, that, and the other thing,' do not forget to say,

I have a part of me, that takes all the rest of me all its time to keep

it down and prevent it from becoming master.' You have traitors in the

fortress who are in communication with the enemy outside, and may go

over to him openly in the very crisis of the fight. You have to take

that fact into account, and it ought to suppress boasting whilst you

are putting on the harness.

You are not old enough to remember, as some of us do, the delirious

enthusiasm with which, in the last Franco-German war, the Emperor and

the troops left Paris, and how, as the train steamed out of the

station, shouts were raised, A. Berlin!' Ay! and they never got farther

than Sedan, and there an Emperor and an army were captured. Go into the

fight bragging, and you will come out of it beaten.

III. Note the confidence which is not boasting.

I can fancy some of you saying, These gloomy views of yours will lead

to nothing but absolute despair. You have been telling us that success

is impossible; that we are bound to fight, and are sure to be beaten.

What are we to do? Throw up the sponge, and say, "Very well! then I may

as well have my fling, and give up all attempts to be any better than

my passions and my senses would lead me to be."' And if there is

nothing more to be said about the fight than has been already said,

that is the conclusion. Let us eat and drink,' not only for to-morrow

we die,' but for to-day we are sure to be beaten.' But I have only been

speaking about this self-distrust as preliminary to what is the main

thing that I desire to urge upon you now, and it is this: You do not

need to be beaten. There is no room for boasting, but there is room for

absolute confidence. You, young men and women, standing at the entrance

of the amphitheatre where the gladiators fight, may dash into the arena

with the most perfect confidence that you will come out with your

shield preserved and your sword unbroken.

There is one way of doing it. Be of good cheer! I have overcome the

world.' That was not the boast of a man putting on the harness, but the

calm utterance of the conquering Christ when He was putting it off. He

has conquered that you may conquer. Remember how the Apostle, who has

preserved for us that note of triumph at the end of Christ's life, has,

like some musician with a favourite phrase, modulated and varied it in

his letter written long after, when he says, This is the victory that

overcometh the world, even our faith.' My dear young friends, distrust

yourselves utterly, and trust Jesus Christ absolutely, and give

yourselves to Him, to be His servants and soldiers till your lives'

end. Then you will not be beaten, for it is written of those who move

in the light, wearing the victor's palm: These are they who overcame by

the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony.' That blood

secures our victory in a threefold fashion. By that great death of

Jesus Christ all our past sins may be forgiven, and they no longer have

power to tyrannise over us. In His sacrifice for us there are motives

given to us for noble, grateful, Godlike living, stronger than all the

temptations that can arise from our own hearts, or from the evils

around us. And if we put our humble trust in Him, then that faith opens

the door for the entrance into our hearts, in simple reality, of a

share in His conquering life which will make us victorious over the

world, the flesh, and the devil.

This is the victory that overcometh the world,' and the youngest,

feeblest Christian who lays his or her hand in Christ's strong hand,

may look out upon all the embattled antagonisms that front them, and

say, He will cover my head in the day of battle, and teach my hands to

war and my fingers to fight.'

Dear young friends, people sometimes preach to you that you should be

Christians, because life is uncertain and death is drawing near, and

after death the judgment. I preach that too; but the gospel that I seek

to press upon you now is not merely a thing to die by, but it is the

thing to live by; and it is the only power by which we shall be sure of

overcoming the armies of the aliens. This confidence in Christ will

take away from you no shred of your natural, youthful, buoyant

elasticity, but it will save you from much transgression and from

bitter regrets.

One last word. There is possible a triumph which is not boasting, for

him who puts off the harness. The war-worn soldier has little heart for

boasting, but he may be able to say, I have not been beaten.' The best

of us, when we come to the end, will have to recognise in retrospect

failures, deficiencies, palterings with evil, yieldings to temptation,

sins of many sorts, that will put all boasting out of our thoughts.

But, whilst that is so, there is sometimes granted to the man, who has

been faithful in his adherence to Jesus Christ, a gleam of sunshine at

eventime, which foretells Heaven's welcome and Well done!', before it

is uttered. He was no self-righteous braggart, but a very rigid judge

of himself, who, close by the headsman's block that ended his life,

said: I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have

kept the faith.' Put on the whole armour of God,' and when the time

comes to put it off, you will have a peaceful assurance as far removed

from despair as it is from boasting. Distrust yourselves; do not

underestimate your enemies; understand that life is warfare; trust

utterly to Jesus Christ, and He will see to it that you are not

conquered, will give you the calm confidence of which we have been

speaking here, and a share hereafter in the throne which He promises to

him that overcometh. If you will trust yourselves to Him, and take

service in His army, you cannot be too certain of victory. If you fling

yourself into the battle in your own strength, with however high a

hope, and fight without the Captain for your ally, you cannot escape

defeat.

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ROYAL MURDERERS

And it came to pass after these things, that Naboth the Jezreelite had

a vineyard, which was in Jezreel, hard by the palace of Ahab king of

Samaria. 2. And Ahab spake unto Naboth, saying, Give me thy vineyard,

that I may have it for a garden of herbs, because it is near unto my

house: and I will give thee for it a better vineyard than it; or, if it

seem good to thee, I will give thee the worth of it in money. 3. And

Naboth said to Ahab, The Lord forbid it me, that I should give the

inheritance of my fathers unto thee. 4. And Ahab came into his house

heavy and displeased because of the word which Naboth the Jezreelite

had spoken to him: for he had said, I will not give thee the

inheritance of my fathers. And he laid him down upon his bed, and

turned away his face, and would eat no bread. 5. But Jezebel his wife

came to him, and said unto him. Why is thy spirit so sad, that thou

eatest no bread? 6. And he said unto her, Because I spake unto Naboth

the Jezreelite, and said unto him, Give me thy vineyard for money: or

else, if it please thee, I will give thee another vineyard for it: and

he answered, I will not give thee my vineyard. 7. And Jezebel his wife

said unto him, Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? arise, and

eat bread, and let thine heart be merry: I will give thee the vineyard

of Naboth the Jezreelite. 8. So she wrote letters in Ahab's name, and

sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and to

the nobles that were in his city, dwelling with Naboth. 9. And she

wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth on high

among the people: 10. And set two men, sons of Belial, before him, to

bear witness against him, saying, Thou didst blaspheme God and the

king. And then carry him out, and stone him, that he may die. 11. And

the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who were the

inhabitants in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, and as it

was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. 12. They

proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. 13. And

there came in two men, children of Belial, and sat before him: and the

men of Belial witnessed against him, even against Naboth, in the

presence of the people, saying, Naboth did blaspheme God and the king.

Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him with

stones, that he died. 14. Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is

stoned, and is dead. 15. And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that

Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take

possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused

to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead. 16. And it

came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up

to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession

of it.'--1 KINGS xxi. 1-16.

There are three types of character in this story, all bad, but in

different ways. Ahab is wicked and weak; Jezebel, wicked and strong;

the elders of Jezreel, wicked and subservient. Amongst them they commit

a great crime, which was the last drop in the full cup of the king's

sins, and brought down God's judgment on him and his house.

I. We have to look at the weakly wicked Ahab. His wish for Naboth's

vineyard was a mere selfish whim. He was willing to give more for it

than it was worth. It suited his convenience for a kitchen-garden. In

the true spirit of an Eastern despot, he expected everything to yield

to his caprice, and did not think that a subject had any rights. What

business has a poor man with sentiment? Naboth is to go, and a handful

of silver will set all right. Samuel's warning of what a king would be

and do was fulfilled. This highhanded interference with private rights

was what Israel's revolt had led to. The sturdy Naboth was influenced

not only by love for the bit of land which his fathers had cultivated

for more years than Ahab had reigned days, but by obedience to the law

of God; and he was not afraid to show himself a Jehovah worshipper, by

his solemn appeal to the Lord,' as well as by the fact of his refusal.

The brusque, flat refusal shows that some independence was left in the

nation.

The weak rage and childish sulking of Ahab are very characteristic of a

feeble and selfish nature, accustomed to be humoured and not thwarted.

These fits of temper seem to have been common with him; for he was in

one at the end of the preceding chapter, as he is now. The bed' on

which he flung himself is probably the couch for reclining on at table,

and, if so, the picture of his passion is still more vivid. Instead of

partaking of the meal, he turns his face to the wall, and refuses food.

No meat will down with him for want of a salad, because wanting

Naboth's vineyard for a garden of herbs.' As he lies there, like a

spoiled child, all because he could not get his own way, he may serve

for an example of the misery of unbridled selfishness and unregulated

desires. An acre or two of land was a small matter to get into such a

state about, and there are few things that are worth a wise or a strong

man's being so troubled. Hezekiah might turn his face to the wall' in

the extremity of sickness and earnestness of prayer; but Ahab in doing

it is only a poor, feeble creature who has weakly set his heart on what

is not his, and weakly whimpers because he cannot have it.

To be thus at the mercy of our own ravenous desires, and so utterly

miserable when they are thwarted, is unworthy of manhood, and is sure

to bring many a bitter moment; for there are more disappointments than

gratifications in store for such a one. We may learn from Ahab, too,

the certainty that weakness will darken into wickedness. Such a mood as

his always brings some Jezebel or other to suggest evil ways of

succeeding. In this wicked world there are more temptations to sin than

helps to virtue, and the weak man will soon fall into some of the

abundant traps laid for him. Unless we have learned to say No' with

much emphasis, because we are strong in the Lord,' we shall fall. This

did not I because of the fear of the Lord.' To be weak is to be

miserable, and any sin may come from it.

II. Jezebel is a type of a different sort of wickedness. She is wicked

and strong. Notice how she takes the upper hand at once, in her abrupt

question, not without a spice of scorn; and note how Ahab answers,

bemoaning himself, putting in the forefront his fair proposal, and

making Naboth's refusal ruder than it really had been, by suppressing

its reason. Then out flashes the imperious will of this masterful

princess, who had come from a land where royalty was all-powerful, and

who had no restraints of conscience. She darts a half-contemptuous

question at Ahab, to stir him to action; for nothing moves a weak man

so much as the fear of being thought weak. Dost thou govern?' implies,

If thou dost, thou mayest trample on a subject.' It should mean, If

thou dost, thou must jealously guard the subject's rights.' What a

proud consciousness of her power speaks in that I will give thee the

vineyard'! It is like Lady Macbeth's Give me the dagger!' No more is

said. She can keep her own counsel, and Ahab suspects that some

violence is to be used, which he had better not know. So, again, his

weakness leads him astray. He does not wish to hear what he is willing

should be done, if only he has not to do it. So feeble men hoodwink

conscience by conniving at evils which they dare not perpetrate, and

then enjoying their fruits, and saying, Thou canst not say I did it.'

Jezebel had Ahab's signet, the badge of authority, which she probably

got from him for her unspoken purpose. Her letter to the elders of

Jezreel speaks out, with cynical disregard of decency, the whole ugly

conspiracy. It is direct, horribly plain, and imperative. There is a

perfect nest of sins hissing and coiled together in it. Hypocrisy

calling religion in to attest a lie, subornation of evidence, contempt

for the poor tools who are to perjure themselves, consciousness that

such work will only be done by worthless men, cool lying, ferocity, and

murder,--these are a pretty company to crowd into half a dozen lines.

Most detestable of all is the plain speaking which shows her hardened

audacity and conscious defiance of all right. To name sin by its true

name, and then to do it without a quiver, is a depth of evil reached by

few men, and perhaps fewer women.

The plot gives a colour of legality, which is probably often unobserved

by readers. Naboth was to be accused of treason: renouncing God and the

king'; and that was, according to the law of Moses, a charge which, if

proved, merited capital punishment. But it is Satan accusing sin for

Jezebel, the Baal worshipper, who had done her best to root out the

name of Jehovah, to accuse Naboth of departing from God. Much

highhanded oppression must have gone before such outspoken contempt of

justice; and, if Ahab represents the fatal connection of weakness and

wickedness, Jezebel is an instance of the fatal audacity with which a

strong character may come, by long indulgence in self-willed

gratification of its own desires, to trample down all obstacles and go

crashing through all laws, human and divine. The climax of sin is to

see a deed to be sinful, and to do it all the same. Such a pre-eminence

in evil is not reached at a bound, but it can be reached; and every

indulgence in passion, and every gratifying of desire against which

conscience protests, is a step toward it. Therefore, if we shrink from

such a goal, let us turn away from the paths that lead to it. No mortal

man is supremely foul all at once.' Therefore resist the beginnings of

evil. Elijah was strong by natural temperament, and so was Jezebel. But

the strength of the prophet was hallowed by obedience, and, like some

great river, poured blessings where it flowed. Jezebel's strength was

lawless, and foamed itself away in fury, like some devastating torrent

that spreads ruin whithersoever it bursts out. Be strong' is good

advice, but it needs the supplement, Let all your deeds be done in

charity,' and the foundation,' Be strong in the Lord, and in the power

of His might.'

III. The last set of actors in this pitiful tragedy are the

subserviently wicked elders. The narrative sets their slavish

compliance in a strong light. It puts emphasis on the tie between them

and Naboth, in that they dwelt in his city,' and so should have had

neighbourly feeling. It lays stress on their cowardly motive and their

complete execution of orders, both by reiterating that they acted as

Jezebel had sent' and as it was written,' and by taking the letter

clause by clause, in the narrative of the shameful parody of justice

which they acted. It suggests both their eagerness to do her pleasure,

and her impatient waiting, in her palace, by the message sent in hot

haste as soon as the brave peasant proprietor was dead. It is ill

sitting at Rome and striving with the Pope,' as the proverb has it. No

doubt these cowards were afraid for their own necks, and were too near

the royal tigress to venture disobedience. But their swift,

unremonstrating, and complete obedience indicates the depth of

degradation and corruption to which they and the nation had sunk, and

the terror exercised by their upstart king and his Sidonian wife.

Cowardice is always contemptible, and wickedness is always odious; but

when the two come together, and a man has no other reason for his sin

than I was afraid,' each makes the other blacker. Israel had cast off

the fear of the Lord, which would have preserved it from the ignoble

terror of men, and the consequence was that it trembled before an

angry, unscrupulous woman. It had revolted from Rehoboam and his

foolish bluster about whips and scorpions, and the consequence was a

worse slavery. If we fear God, we need have no other fear. The sun puts

out a fire. If we rebel against Him, we do not become free, but fall

under a heavy yoke. It is never prudent to do wrong. The worst

consequences of resistance to powerful evil are easier to bear than

those of compliance, though it may seem the safer. Better be lying dead

beneath a heap of stones, like the sturdy Naboth, who could say No' to

a king, than be one of his stoners, who killed their innocent neighbour

to pleasure Jezebel!

Her indecent triumph at the success of the plot, and her utter

callousness, are expressed in her words to Ahab, in which the main

point is the taking possession of the vineyard. The death of its owner

is told with exultation, as being nothing but the sweeping aside of an

obstacle. Ahab asks no questions as to how this opportune clearing away

of hindrance came about. He knew, no doubt, well enough that there had

been foul play; but that does not matter to him, and such a trifle as

murder does not slacken his glad haste to get his new toy. There was

other red on the vines than their clustering grapes, as he soon found

out, when Elijah's grim figure, like an embodied conscience, met him

there. Whoever reaches out to grasp a fancied good by breaking God's

law, may get his good, but he will get more than he expected along with

it,--even an accusing voice that prophesies evil. Elijah strides among

the leafy vines in the field bought by crime. Ahab meant to make it a

garden of pot-herbs. Surely the bitter wormwood of divine revenge grew

abundantly therein.'

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AHAB AND ELIJAH

And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy!.'--1 KINGS

xxi. 20.

The keynote of Elijah's character is force-the force of righteousness.

The New Testament, you remember, speaks of the power of Elias.' The

outward appearance of the man corresponds to his function and his

character. Gaunt and sinewy, dwelling in the desert, feeding on locusts

and wild honey, with a girdle of camel's skin about his loins, he

bursts into the history, amongst all that corrupt state of society,

with the force of a hammer that God's hand wields. The whole of his

career is marked by this one thing,--the strength of a righteous man.

And then, on the other hand, this Ahab;--the keynote of his character

is the weakness of wickedness, and the wickedness of weakness. Think of

him. Weakly longing--as idle and weak minds in lofty places always

do--after something that belongs to somebody else; with all his

gardens, coveting the one little herb-plot of the poor Naboth; weak and

worse than womanly, turning his face to the wall and weeping when he

cannot get it; weakly desiring to have it, and yet not knowing how to

set about accomplishing his wish; and then--as is always the case, for

there are always tempters everywhere for weak people--that beautiful

fiend by his side, like the other queen in our great drama, ready to

screw the feeble man that she is wedded to, to the sticking-place, and

to dare anything to grasp that on which the heart was set. And so the

deed is done: Naboth safe stoned out of the way; and Ahab goes down to

take possession! The lesson of that is, my friend,--Weak dallying with

forbidden desires is sure to end in wicked clutching at them. Young

men, take care! You stand upon the beetling edge of a great precipice,

when you look over, from your fancied security, at a wrong thing; and

to strain too far, and to look too fixedly, leads to a perilous danger

of toppling over and being lost! If you know that a thing cannot be won

without transgression, do not tamper with hankerings for it. Keep away

from the edge, and shut your eyes from beholding vanity.'

But my business now is rather with the consequences of this apparently

successful sin, than with what went before it. The king gets the crime

done, shuffles it off himself on to the shoulders of his ready tools in

the little village, goes down to get his toy, and gets it--but he gets

Elijah along with it, which was more than he reckoned on. When, all

full of impatience and hot haste to solace himself with his new

possession, he rushes down to seize the vineyard, he finds there,

standing at the gate, waiting for him--black-browed, motionless, grim,

an incarnate conscience--the prophet whom he had not seen for years,

the prophet that he had last seen on Carmel, bearding alone the

servants of Baal, and executing on them the solemn judgment of death;

and there leaps at once to his lip, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?'

I. I find here, in the first place, this broad principle: Pleasure won

by sin is peace lost.

It does not need that there should be a rebuking prophet standing by to

work out that law. God commits the execution of it to the natural

operations of our own consciences and our own spirits. Here is the fact

in men's natures on which it partly depends: when sin is yet tempting

us, it is loved; when sin in done, it is loathed. Action and reaction,

as the mechanicians tell us, are equal and contrary. The more violent

the blow with which we strike upon the forbidden pleasure, the further

back the rebound after the stroke. When sin tempts--when there hangs

glittering before a man the golden fruit which he knows that he ought

not to touch--then, amidst the noise of passion or the sophistry of

desire, conscience is silenced for a little while. No man sins without

knowing that it is wrong, without knowing that in the long run it is a

mistake; but at the instant, in the delirium of yielding, as in moments

of high physical excitement, he is blind and deaf, deaf to the voice of

reason, blind to the sight of consequences. Conscience and consequence

are alike lost sight of. Like a mad bull, the man that is tempted

lowers his head and shuts his eyes, and rushes right on. The moment

that the sin is done, that moment the passion or desire which tempted

to it is satiated, and ceases to exist for the time. It is gone as a

motive. Like some savage beast, being fed full, it lies down to sleep.

There is a vacuum left in the heart, the noise is stilled, and then--

and then--conscience begins to speak. Or, to take another image, the

passion, the desires, the impulses that lead us to do wrong things--

they are like a crew that mutiny, and take for a moment the wheel from

the steersman and the command from the captain, but then, having driven

the ship on the rocks, the mutineers get intoxicated, and lie down and

sleep. Passion fulfils itself, and expires. The desire is satisfied,

and it turns into a loathing. The tempter draws us to him, and then

unveils the horrid face that lies beneath the mask. When the deed is

done and cannot be undone, then comes satiety; then comes the reaction

of the fierce excitement, the hot blood begins to flow more slowly;

then rises up in the heart conscience; then rises up in majesty in the

soul reason; then flashes and flares before the eye the vivid picture

of the consequences. His enemy' has found the sinner. He has got the

vineyard--ay, but Elijah is there, and his dark and stern presence

sucks all the brightness and the sunniness out of the landscape; and

Naboth's blood stains the leaves of Naboth's garden! There is no sin

which is not the purchase of pleasure at the price of peace.

Now, you will say that all that is true in regard to the grosser forms

of transgression, but that it is not true in regard to the less vulgar

and sensual kinds of crime. Of course it is most markedly observable

with regard to the coarsest kind of sins; but it is as true, though

perhaps not in the same degree--not in the same prominent, manifest way

at any rate--in regard to every sin that a man does. There is never an

evil thing which--knowing it to be evil--we commit, which does not rise

up to testify against us. As surely as (in the words of our great

philosopher poet) lust dwells hard by hate,' and as surely as

to-night's debauch is followed by to-morrow's headache, so surely--each

after its kind, and each in its own region--every sin lodges in the

human heart the seed of a quick-springing punishment, yea, is its own

punishment. When we come to grasp the sweet thing that we have been

tempted to seize, there is a serpent that starts up amongst all the

flowers. When the evil act is done--opposite of the prophet's roll--it

is sweet in the lips, but oh! it is bitter afterwards. At the last it

biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder!'

Then, you may say again, All that is very much exaggerated. That is not

the sort of feeling which men that go on persistently doing wrong

things, cherish. They live quietly and contentedly enough. "There are

no bands in their death, and their strength is firm."' All that would

be true if men's consciences kept sensitive in the midst of men's sins,

but they do not; and so it cannot be that every transgression has thus

its quick result in loss of peace. I grant you at once that it is quite

possible for men to sin away the delicacy and susceptibility of their

consciences. I dare say there are people here now who, after they have

done a wrong thing, go on very quietly, with no knowledge of those

agonies that I have been speaking about, with scarcely ever a prick of

conscience for their sin. But what then? I did not say that all sin

purchased pleasure by inflictions of agony; but I do say, that all sin

purchases pleasure by loss of peace. The silence of a seared conscience

is not peace. For peace you want something more than that a conscience

shall be dumb. For peace you want something more than that you shall be

able to live without the daily sense and sting of sin. You want not

only the negative absence of pain, but the positive presence of a

tranquillising guest in your heart--that conscience of yours testifying

with you, blessing you in its witness, and shedding abroad rest and

comfort. It is easy to kill a conscience--after a fashion at least. It

is easy to stifle it. It is easy to come to that depth of wrongdoing

that one gets used to it, and does it without caring. But oh! that cold

vacuum, that dead absence in such a spirit of all healthy

self-communing, that painful suspicion, If I look into myself, and be

quiet for a little while, and take stock of my own character, and see

what I am, the balance will be on the wrong side,'--that is not peace.

As the old historian says about the Roman armies that marched through a

country, burning and destroying every living thing, They make a

solitude, and they call it peace.' And so men do with their

consciences. They stifle them, sear them, forcibly silence them,

somehow or other; and then, when there is a dead stillness in the

heart, broken by no voice of either approbation or blame, but doleful

like the unnatural quiet of a deserted city, then they call that peace,

and the man's uncontrolled passions and unbridled desires dwell

solitary in the fortress of his own spirit! You may almost attain to

that. Do you think it is a goal to be set before you as an ideal of

human nature? The loss of peace is certain--the presence of agony is

most likely--from every act of sin.

And so, it is not only a crime that men commit when they do wrong, but

it is a blunder. Sin is not only guilt, but it is a mistake. The game

is not worth the candle,' according to the French proverb. The thing

that you buy is not worth the price you pay for it. Sin is like a great

forest-tree that we may sometimes see standing up green in its leafy

beauty, and spreading a broad shadow over half a field; but when we get

round on the other side, there is a great dark hollow in the very heart

of it, and corruption is at work there. It is like the poison-tree in

travellers' stories, tempting weary men to rest beneath its thick

foliage, and insinuating death into the limbs that relax in the fatal

coolness of its shade. It is like the apples of Sodom, fair to look

upon, but turning to acrid ashes on the unwary lips. It is like the

magician's rod that we read about in old books. There it lies; and if,

tempted by its glitter, or fascinated by the power that it proffers

you, you take it in your hand, the thing starts into a serpent with

erected crest and sparkling eye, and plunges its quick barb into the

hand that holds it, and sends poison through all the veins. Do not

touch it, my brother! Every sin buys pleasure at the price of peace.

Elijah is always waiting at the gate of the ill-gotten possession.

II. In the second place, Sin is blind to its true friends and its real

foes.

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' Elijah was the best friend that Ahab

had in his kingdom. And that Jezebel there, the wife of his bosom, whom

he loved and thanked for this new toy, she was the worst foe that hell

could have sent him. Ay, and so it is always. The faithful rebuker, the

merciful inflicter of pain, is the truest friend of the wrongdoer. The

worst enemy of the sinful heart is the voice that either tempts it into

sin, or lulls it into self-complacency. And this is one of the most

certain workings of evil desires in our spirits, that they pervert for

us all the relations of things, that they make us blind to all the

moral truths of God's universe. Sin is blind as to itself, blind as to

its own consequences, blind as to who are its friends and who are its

foes, blind as to earth, blind as to another world, blind as to God.

The man who walks in the vain show' of transgression, whose heart is

set upon evil,--he fancies that ashes are bread, and stones gold (as in

the old fairy story); and, on the other hand, he thinks that the true

sweet is the bitter, and turns away from God's angels and God's

prophets, with, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' That is the reason,

my friend, of not a little of the infidelity that haunts this

world--that sin, perverted and blinded, stumbles about in its darkness,

and mistakes the face of the friend for the face of the foe. God sends

you in mercy a conscience to prick and sting you that you may be kept

right; and you think that it is your enemy. God sends in His mercy the

discipline of life, pains and sorrows, to draw us away from the wrong,

to make us believe that the right in this world and the next is life,

and that holiness is happiness for evermore. And then, when, having

done wrong, God's merciful messenger of a sharp sorrow finds us out, we

say, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' and begin to wonder about the

mysteries of Providence, and how it comes that there is evil in the

creation of a good God. Why, physical evil is the best friend of the

man that is subject to moral evil. Sorrow is the truest blessing to a

sinner. The best thing that can befall any of us is that God shall not

let us alone in any wrong course, without making us feel His rod,

without hedging up our way with thorns, and sending us by His grace

into a better one. There is no mystery in sorrow. There is a mystery in

sin; but sorrow following on the back of sin is the true friend, and

not the enemy, of the wrong-doing spirit.

And then, again, God sends us a gospel full of dark words about evil.

It deals with that fact of sin, as no other system ever did. There is

no book like the Bible for these two things,--for the lofty notion that

it has about what man may be and ought to be; and for the low notion

that it has of what man is. It does not degrade human nature, because

it tells us the truth about human nature as it is. Its darkest and

bitterest sayings about transgression, they are veiled promises, my

brother. It does not make the consequences of sin which it writes down.

You and I make them for ourselves, and it tells us of them. Did the

lighthouse make the rock that it stands on? Is it to be blamed for the

shipwreck? If a man will go full tilt against the thing that he knows

will ruin him, what is the right name for him who hedges it up with a

prickly fence of thorns, and puts a great light above it, and writes

below, If thou comest here thou diest'? Is that the work of an enemy?

And yet that is why people talk about the gloomy views of the gospel,

about the narrow spirit of Christianity, about the harsh things that

are here! The Bible did not make hell. The Bible did not make sin the

parent of sorrow. The Bible did not make it certain that every

transgression and disobedience' should reap its just recompense of

reward.' We are the causes of their coming upon ourselves; and the

Bible but proclaims the end to which the paths of sin must lead, and

beseechingly calls to us all, Turn ye, turn ye! why will ye die?' And

yet when it comes to you, how many of you turn away from it, and say,

It is mine enemy'! How many shrink from its merciful knife, that cuts

into all the wounds of the festering spirit! How many of you feel as if

the truth that is in Jesus' was a hard and bitter truth; when all the

while its very heart's blood is love, and the very secret of its

message is the tenderest compassion, the most yearning sympathy, for

every soul amongst us!

Ay, and more than that:--sin makes us fancy that God Himself is our

enemy; and sin makes that thought of God that ought to be most blessed

and most sweet to us, the terror of our souls. You have the power, my

friend, by your own wrongdoing, of perverting the whole universe, and,

worst of all, of distorting the image of the merciful Father, of the

loving God. God loves. God is the Father. God watches over us. God will

not let us alone when we transgress, God in His love has appointed that

sin shall breed sorrow. But we--we do wrong; and then, for God's

Providence, and God's Gospel, and God's Son, and God Himself, there

rises up in our hearts a hostile feeling, and we think that He is

turned to be our enemy, and fights against us! But oh! He only fights

against us that we may submit to, and love, Him. Will you, then, have

it that God's highest mercy should be your greatest sorrow, that your

truest friend should be your worst foe? You can make the choice. To you

God and His truth are like that ark of His covenant which to Dagon and

the Philistines was a curse, but to the house of Obededom was a

blessing. He and His gospel are to you like that pillar that was

darkness and trouble to the hosts of the Egyptians, but light by night

to His children. To you, my brother, the gospel may be either the

savour of life unto life, or the savour of death unto death!' If He

comes to you with rebuke, and meets you when you are at the very door

of your sin, and busy with your transgression,--usher Him in, and thank

Him, and bless Him for words of threatening, for merciful severity, for

conviction of sin;--because conviction of sin is the work of the

Comforter; and all the threatenings and all the pains that follow and

track, like swift hounds, the committer of evil, are sent by Him who

loves too wisely not to punish transgression, and loves too well to

punish without warning, and desires only when He punishes that we

should turn from our evil way, and escape the condemnation. An enemy,

or a friend,--which is God in His truth to you?

III. Lastly, the sin which mistakes the friendly appeal for an enemy,

lays up for itself a terrible retribution. Elijah comes to Jezreel and

prophesies the fall of Ahab. The next peal, the next flash, fulfil the

prediction. There, where he did the wrong, he suffered. In Jezreel,

Ahab died. In Jezreel, Jezebel died. That plain was the battlefield for

the subsequent discomfiture of Israel. Over and over again there

encamped upon it the hosts of the spoilers. Over and over again its

soil ran red with the blood of the children of Israel; and at last, in

the destruction of the kingdom, Naboth was avenged and God's word

fulfilled. The threatened evil was foretold that it might lead the king

to repentance, and that thus it might never need to be more than a

threat. But, though Ahab was partially penitent, and partially listened

to the prophet's voice, yet for all that, he went on in his evil way.

Therefore the merciful threatening becomes a stern prophecy, and is

fulfilled to the very letter.

So, when God's message comes to us, friends, if we listen not to it,

and turn not to its gentle rebuke, Oh! then we gather up for ourselves

an awful futurity of judgment, when threatening will darken into

punishment, and the voice that rebuked will swell into the voice of

final condemnation. When a man fancies that God's prophet is his enemy,

and dreams that his finding him out is a calamity and a loss, that man

may be certain that something worse will find him out some day. His

sins will find him out, and that is worse than the prophet's coming. My

friend, picture to yourself this--a human spirit shut up, with the

companionship of its forgotten and dead transgressions. There is a

resurrection of acts as well as of bodies. Think what it will be for a

man to sit surrounded by that ghastly company, the ghosts of his own

sins!--and as each forgotten fault and buried badness comes, silent and

sheeted, into that awful society, and sits itself down there, think of

him greeting each with the question, Thou too? What! are ye all here?

Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?' and from each bloodless spectral lip

there tolls out the answer, the knell of his life, I have found thee,

because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.'

Ah, my friend! if that were all we had to say, it might well stiffen us

into stony despair. Thank God--thank God! such an issue is not

inevitable. Christ speaks to you. Christ is your Friend. He loves you,

and He speaks to you now--speaks to you of your danger, but in order

that you may never rush into it and be engulfed by it; speaks to you of

your sin, but in order that you may say to Him, Take Thou it away, O

merciful Lord'; speaks to you of justice, but in order that you may

never sink beneath the weight of His stroke; speaks to you of love, in

order that you may know, and fully know, the depth of His graciousness.

When He says to you, I love thee; love thou Me: I have died for thee;

trust Me, live by Me, and live for Me, will you not say to Him, My

Friend, my Brother, my Lord, and my God'?

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UNPOSSESSED POSSESSIONS

And the king of Israel said unto his servants, Know ye that Ramoth in

Gilead is ours, and we be still, and take it not out of the hand of the

king of Syria?.'--1 KINGS xxii. 3.

This city of Ramoth in Gilead was an important fortified place on the

eastern side of the Jordan, and had, many years before the date of our

text, been captured by its northern neighbours in the kingdom of Syria.

A treaty had subsequently been concluded and broken a war followed

thereafter, in which Ben-hadad, King of Syria, had bound himself to

restore all his conquests. He had not observed that article of peace,

and the people of Israel had not been strong enough to enforce it until

the date of our text; but then, backed up by a powerful alliance with

Jehoshaphat of Judah, they determined to make a dash to get back what

was theirs, but whilst theirs was also not theirs.

Now, I have nothing more to do with Ahab and Jehoshaphat, but I wish to

turn the words of my test, and the thoughts that may come from them,

into a direction profitable to ourselves. Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead

is ours?' and yet it had to be got out of the hands of the King of

Syria.

I. What is ours and not ours.

Every Christian man has large tracts of unannexed territory, unattained

possibilities, unenjoyed blessings, things that are his and yet not

his. How much more of God you and I have a right to than we have the

possession of! The ocean is ours, but only the little pailful that we

carry away home to our own houses is of use to us. The whole of God is

mine if I am Christ's, and a dribble of God is all that comes into the

lives of most of us.

How much inward peace is ours? It is meant that there should never pass

across a Christian's soul more than a ripple of agitation, which may

indeed ruffle and curl the surface; but deep down there should be the

tranquillity of the fathomless ocean, unbroken by any tempests, and yet

not stagnant, because there is a vital current running through it, and

every drop is being drawn upward to the surface and the sunlight. There

may be a peace in our hearts deep as life; a tranquillity which may be

superficially disturbed, but is never thoroughly, and down in its

depths, broken. And yet, let some little petty annoyance come into our

daily life, and what a pucker we are in! Then we forget all about the

still depths in which we ought to be living; and fears and hopes and

loves and ambitions disturb our souls, just as they do the spirits of

the men that do not profess to have any holdfast in God. The peace of

God is ours; but, ah! in how sad a sense it is true that the peace of

God is not ours!

What heights'--for Ramoth means high places'--what heights of

consecration there are which are ours according to the divine purpose

and according to the fulness of God's gift! It is meant, and it is

possible, and well within the reach of every Christian soul, that he or

she should live, day by day, in the continual and utter surrender of

himself or herself to the will of God, and should say, I do the little

I can do, and leave the rest with Thee'; and should say again, All is

right that seems most wrong, If it be His sweet will.' But instead of

this absolute submission and completeness and joyfulness of surrender

of ourselves to Him, what do we find? Reluctance to obey, regret at

providences, Self dominant or struggling hard against the partial

domination of the will of God in our hearts. The mind which was in

Jesus Christ, who was able to say, It is written of Me, lo! I come to

do Thy will, O Lord!' is ours by virtue of our being Christians; but,

alas! in practical realisation how sadly it is not ours!

What noble possibilities of service, what power in the world, are

bestowed on Christ's people!' All power is given unto Me in heaven and

in earth,' says He. And He breathed on them, and said, As My Father

hath sent Me, even so send I you.' The divine gift to the Christian

community, and to the individuals that compose it--for there are no

gifts given to the community, but to the individuals that make it up--

is of fulness of power for all their work. And yet look how, all

through the ages, the Church has been beaten by the corruption of the

world; and how to-day many of us are standing, either utterly careless

and callous about the diseases that we have the medicine to cure, or in

desperation looking about for other healing for the social and moral

condition of the community than that which is granted to us in Jesus

Christ. Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still, and

take it not out of the hands of the King of Syria?'

There is ever so much in the world which belongs to our Master, and

therefore belongs to us, and which the Church is bound to lay its hand

upon and claim for its own and for its Lord's. For remember, brethren,

that all the gifts at which I have been glancing--and I might have

largely increased the catalogue--all these spiritual endowments of

peace, and safety, and purity, and joy, of religious elevation, and

consecration, and power for service, and the like--are ours by a

threefold title and charter. God's purpose, which is nothing less for

every one of us than that we should be filled with all the fulness of

God,' and that He should supply all our need, according to His riches

in glory,'--that is the first of the parchments on which our title

depends. And the second title-deed is Christ's purchase; for the

efficacy of His death and the power of His triumphant life have secured

for all who trust Him the whole fulness of this divine gift. And the

third of our claims and titles is the influence of that Holy Spirit

whom Jesus Christ gives to every one of His children to dwell in him.

There is in you, working in you, if you have any faith in that Lord, a

power that is capable of making you perfectly pure, perfectly blessed,

strong with an immortal strength, and glad with a joy that is

unspeakable and full of glory.'

Oh! then, let us think of the awful contrast between what is ours and

what we have. It is ours by the divine intention, by the divine gift in

its fulness and all-sufficiency, and yet think of the poor, partial

realisation of it that has passed into our experience. Be sure that you

have what you have, and that you make your own what God has made yours.

II. Then, let me suggest, again, how our text hints for us, not only

the difference between possession and realisation, but also our strange

contentment in imperfect possession.

Ahab's remonstrances with his servants, which make the starting-point

of my remarks, seem to suggest that there were two reasons for their

acquiescence in the domination of a foreign power on a bit of their

soil. They had not realised that Ramoth was theirs, and they were too

lazy and cowardly to go and take it. Ignorance of the fulness of the

gift, and slothful timidity in daring everything in the effort to make

it ours, explain a great deal of the present condition of Christian

people.

Is not that condition of passive acquiescence in their small present

attainments, and of careless indifference to the great stretch of the

unattained, the characteristic of the mass of professing Christians?

They have got a foothold on a new continent, and their possession of it

is like the world's drawing of the map of Africa when we were children,

which had a settlement dotted here and there along the coast, and all

the broad regions of the interior were blank. The settlers huddle

together upon the fringe of barren sand by the salt water, and never

dream of pressing forward into the heart of the land. And so, too, many

of us are content with what we have got, a little bit of God, when we

might have Him all; a settlement on the fringe and edge of the land,

when we might traverse the whole length of it; and behold! it is all

ours.

That unfamiliarity with the thought of unattained possibilities in the

Christian life is a damning curse of thousands of people who call

themselves Christians. They do not think, they never realise--and some

of us are guilty in this respect--they never realise that it is

possible for them to be all unlike what they are now, and that, instead

of the miserable partial hallowing of their nature, and the poor, weak

--I was going to say strength, but it is not worth calling strength,

that they possess, they might be as the angels of God: the weakest as

David,' and David as a very angel of heaven itself. Why is it, why is

it, that there is this unfamiliarity?

And then, another reason for the woful disproportion between what we

have and what we utilise is the love of ease, such as kept these

Israelites from going up to Ramoth-Gilead. It was a long way off; there

was a river to be forded; there were heights to be climbed; there were

weary marches to be taken; there were hard knocks going in front of the

walls of Ramoth before they got inside it; and on the whole it was more

comfortable to sit at home, or look after their farms and their

merchandise, than to embark on the quixotic attempt to win back a city

that had not been theirs for ever so long, and that they had got on

very well without.

And so it is with hosts of Christian people; we do not realise how much

we have that we never get any good out of. And, in the second place, we

had rather just stay where we are, and make the best of the world as it

is, and the desires of our hearts go in another direction than for our

increase in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour. Ah,

brethren! if we had a claim to some great property, or any other wealth

that we really cared about, should we be so very indifferent as to

asserting our rights? Should we not fight to the death, some of us, for

the last inch of soil, for the last ounce of treasure, that belonged to

us? When you really value a thing, you secure the greatest possible

amount of it; and there is very little margin between what you own and

what you use.

And if there is such a tremendous difference between the breadth of the

one and the narrowness of the other in our Christian life, there can be

no reason for it except this, that we do not care enough about

spiritual blessings and forces to make the effort that is needed to win

and keep, and get the good of, all that is ours.

And is not that something like despising the birthright? Is it not a

criminal thing for Christian people thus to neglect, and to put aside,

and never to seek to obtain, all these great gifts of God? There they

lie at our doors, and they are ours for the taking. Suppose a carrier

brought you a whole waggon full of precious goods, and put them down at

your door, and you were not at the trouble to open your doors, or to

carry the goods into your cellars. That would not look as if you cared

much either for the goods or for the giver. And I wonder how many of us

are chargeable with that criminal despising of God's gifts, which is

clearly the explanation of our letting them lie rotting, as it were, at

our gates? We are starving paupers in the midst of plenty.

My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory, by

Christ Jesus,' says Paul. You have the right to them all. Draw cheques

against the capital that is lodged in your name in that great bank.

III. And so, lastly, my text suggests the effort that is needed to make

our own ours.

We be still, and take it not out of the hands of the King of Syria.'

Then these things that are ours, by God's gift, by Christ's purchase,

by the Spirit's influence, will need our effort to secure them. And

that is no contradiction, nor any paradox. God does exactly in the same

way with regard to a great many of His natural gifts as He does with

regard to His spiritual ones. He gives them to us, but we hold them on

this tenure, that we put forth our best efforts to get and to keep

them. His giving them does not set aside our taking. However much we

tried we could not take them out of His hand if it were clenched. Open

as His hand is, and stretched out to us as it is, the gifts that

sparkle in it are not transferred to our hands unless we ourselves put

forth an effort.

So let me say that one large part of the discipline by which men make

their own their own is by familiarising themselves with the thought of

the larger possibilities of unattained possessions which God has given

them. That is true in everything. To recognise our present

imperfection, and to see stretching before us glorious and immense

possibilities, opening out into a vista where our eyesight fails us to

travel to its end, is the very salt of life in every region. Artist,

student, all of us are saved by hope,' in a very much wider sense than

the Apostle meant by that great saying. And whosoever has once lost, or

felt becoming dim, the vision before him of a possible better than his

present best, in any region, is in that region condemned to grow no

more. If we desire to have any kind of advancement, it is only possible

for us, when there gleams ever before us the untravelled road, and we

see at the end of it unattained brightnesses and blessings.

And we Christian people have an endless prospect of that sort

stretching before us. Oh, if we looked at it oftener, having respect

unto the recompense of the reward,' we should find it easier to dash at

any Ramoth-Gilead, and get it out of the hands of the strongest of the

enemies that may bar our way to it. Let us familiarise ourselves with

the thought of our present imperfection, and of our future

completeness, and of the possibilities which may become actualities,

even here and now; and let us not fitfully use what power we have, but

make the best of what graces are ours, and enjoy and expatiate in the

spiritual blessings of peace and rest which Christ has already given to

us. To him that hath shall be given,' and the surest way to lose what

we have is to neglect to increase it.

And, above all, let us keep nearer to our Master, and live more in

fellowship with our Lord, and that will help us to deny ourselves to

ungodliness and worldly lusts. It is the prevalence of these, and the

absence of self-denial, that ruins most of the Christian lives that are

ruined in this world. If a man wants to be what he is not, he must

cease to be what he is.

Self-sacrifice, and the emptying of our hearts of trash and trifles, is

the only way to get our hearts filled with God and with His blessing.

Let us keep near Jesus Christ. If we have Him for ours we have peace,

we have power, we have purity. He of God is made unto us' all in all,

and every gift that may adorn humanity, and make our lives joyous and

ourselves noble, is given to us in Jesus Christ. Let us put away from

ourselves, then, this slothful indifference to our unattained

possessions. Know ye that Ramoth is ours?' Let us be still' no longer.

All things are yours, whether the world, or life, or death, or things

present, or things to come: all are yours if ye are Christ's.'

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AHAB AND MICAIAH

And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides,

that we might enquire of him? 8. And the king of Israel said unto

Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we

may enquire of the Lord: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good

concerning me, but evil.'--1 KINGS xxii. 7, 8.

An ill-omened alliance had been struck up between Ahab of Israel and

Jehoshaphat of Judah. The latter, who would have been much better in

Jerusalem, had come down to Samaria to join in an assault on the

kingdom of Damascus; but, like a great many other people, Jehoshaphat

first made up his mind without asking God, and then thought that it

might be well to get some kind of varnish of a religious sanction for

his decision. So he proposes to Ahab to inquire of the Lord about this

matter. One would have thought that that should have been done before,

and not after, the determination was made. Ahab does not at all see the

necessity for such a thing, but, to please his scrupulous ally, he

sends for his priests. They came, four hundred of them, and of course

they all played the tune that Ahab called for. It is not difficult to

get prophets to pat a king on the back, and tell him, Do what you

like.'

But Jehoshaphat was not satisfied yet. Perhaps he thought that Ahab's

clergy were not exactly God's prophets, but at all events he wanted an

independent opinion; and so he asks if there is not in all Samaria a

man that can be trusted to speak out. He gets for answer the name of

this Micaiah the son of Imlah.' Ahab had had experience of him, and

knew his man; and the very name leads him to an explosion of passion,

which, like other explosions, lays bare some very ugly depths. I hate

him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil.'

That is a curious mood, is it not? that a man should know another to be

a messenger of God, and therefore know that his words are true, and

that if he asked his counsel he would be forbidden to do the thing that

he is dead set on doing, and would be warned that to do it was

destruction; and that still he should not ask the counsel, nor ever

dream of dropping the purpose, but should burst out in a passion of

puerile rage against the counsellor, and will have none of his

reproofs. Very curious! But there are a great many of us that have

something of the same mood in us, though we do not speak it out as

plainly as Ahab did. It lurks more or less in us all, and it largely

determines the attitude that some of us take to Christianity and to

Christ. So I wish to say a word or two about it.

I. My text suggests the inevitable opposition between a message from

God, and man's evil.

No doubt, God is love; and just because He is, it is absolutely

necessary that what comes from Him, and is the reflex and cast, so to

speak, of His character, should be in stern and continual antagonism to

that evil which is the worst foe of men, and is sure to lead to their

death. It is because God is love, that to the froward He shows Himself

froward.' and opposes that which, unopposed and yielded to, will ruin

the man that does it. So this is one of the characteristic marks of all

true messages from God, that men who will not part with their evil call

them stern,' rigid,' gloomy,' narrow' Yes, of course; because God must

look upon godless lives with disapprobation, and must desire by all

means to draw men away from that which is drawing them away from Him

and to their death.

Now, I suppose I need not spend time in enumerating or describing the

points in the attitude of Christianity towards the solemn fact of human

sin, which correspond to Ahab's complaint that the prophet spake always

not good concerning him, but evil.' The gospel' of Jesus Christ proves

its name to be true, and that it is good news,' not only by its

graciousness, its promises, its offers, and the rich blessings of

eternal life with which its hands are full, but by its severity, as men

call it. One characteristic of the gospel is the altogether unique

place which the fact of sin fills in it. There is no other religion on

the face of the earth that has so grasped and made prominent this

thought: All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.' There is

none that has painted human nature as it is in such dark colours,

because there is none that knows itself to be able to change human

nature into such radiance of glory and purity. The gospel has, if I

might so say, on its palette a far greater range of pigments than any

other system. Its blacks are blacker; its whites are whiter; its golds

are more lustrous than those of other painters of human nature as it is

and as it may become. It is a mark of its divine origin that it

unfalteringly looks facts in the face, and will not say smooth things

about men as they are.

Side by side with that characteristic of the dark picture which it

draws of us, as we are in ourselves, is its unhesitating restraint or

condemnation of deep-seated desires and tendencies. It does not come to

men with the smooth words on its lips, Do as thou wilt.' It does not

seek for favour by relaxing bonds, but it rigidly builds up a wall on

either side of a narrow path, and says, Walk within these limits and

thou art safe. Go beyond them a hair's-breadth, and thou perishest.' It

may suit Ahab's prophets to fling the reins on the neck of human

nature; God's prophet says, Thou shalt not,' That is another of the

tests of divine origin, that there shall be no base compliance with

inclinations, but rigid condemnation of many of our deep desires.

Side by side with these two, there is a third characteristic that the

Word, which is the outcome and expression of the divine love, is

distinguished by its plain and stern declarations of the bitter

consequences of evil-doing. I need not dwell upon these, brethren. They

seem to me to be far too solemn to be spoken of by a man to men in

other words than Scripture's. But I beseech you to remember that this,

too, is the characteristic of Christ's message. So a man should feel,

when he thinks of the dark and solemn things that the Old Testament

partially, and the New Testament more clearly, utter as to the death

which is the outcome of sin, that these are indeed the very voice of

infinite love pleading with us all. Brother I do not so misapprehend

facts as to think that the restraints and threatenings and dark

pictures which Christ and His servants have drawn are anything but the

utterance of the purest affection.

II. Now, secondly, let me ask you to look for a moment at the strange

dislike which this attitude of Christianity kindles.

I have said that Ahab's mental condition was a very odd one. Strange as

it is, it is, as I have already remarked, in some degree a very

frequent one. There are in us all, as we see in many regions of life,

the beginnings of the same kind of feeling. Here, for example, is a

course that I am quite sure, if I pursue it, will land me in evil. Does

the drunkard take a glass the less, because he knows that if he goes on

he will have a drunkard's liver and die a miserable death? Does the

gambler ever take away his hand from the pack of cards or the dice-box,

because he knows that play means, in the long run, poverty and

disgrace? When a man sets his will upon a certain course, he is like a

bull that has started in its rage. Down goes the head, and, with eyes

shut, he will charge a stone wall or an iron door, though he knows it

will smash his skull. Men are very foolish animals; and there is no

greater mark of their folly than the conspicuous and oft-repeated fact

that the clearest vision of the consequences of a course of conduct is

powerless to turn a man from it, when once his passions, or his will,

or, worse still, his weakness, or, worst of all, his habits, have bound

him to it.

Take another illustration. Do we not all know that honest friends have

sometimes fallen out of favour, perhaps with ourselves, because they

have persistently kept telling us what our consciences and common-sense

knew to be true, that if we go on by that road we shall be suffocated

in a bog? A man makes up his mind to a course of conduct. He has a

shrewd suspicion that an honest friend will condemn him, and that the

condemnation will be right. What does he do, therefore? He never

consults his friend, but if by chance that friend should say what was

expected of him, he gets angry with his adviser and doggedly goes his

own road. I suppose we all know what it is to treat our consciences in

the style in which Ahab treated Micaiah. We do not listen to them

because we know what they will say before they have said it; and we

call ourselves sensible people! Martin Luther once said, It is neither

safe nor wise to do anything against conscience.' But Ahab put Micaiah

in prison; and we shut up our consciences in a dungeon, and put a gag

in their mouths, and a muffler over the gag, that we may hear them say

no word, because we know that what we are doing, and we are doggedly

determined to do, is wrong.

But the saddest illustration of this infatuation is to be found in the

attitude that many men take in regard to Christianity. There is a great

craving to-day, more perhaps than there has been in some other periods

of the world's history, for a religion which shall adorn, but shall not

restrain; for a religion which shall be toothless, and have no bite in

it; for a religion that shall sanction anything that it pleases our

sovereign mightiness to want to do. We should all like to have God's

sanction for our actions. But there are a great many of us who will not

take the only way to secure that--viz. to do the actions which He

commands, and to abstain from those which He forbids. Popular

Christianity is a very easy-fitting garment; it is like an old shoe

that you can slip off and on without any difficulty. But a religion

which does not put up a strong barrier between you and many of your

inclinations in not worth anything. The mark of a message from God is

that it restrains and coerces and forbids and commands. And some of you

do not like it because it does.

There is a great tendency in this day to cut out of the Old and New

Testaments all the pages that say things like this, The soul that

sinneth it shall die'; or things like this, This is the condemnation,

that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than

light'; or things like this, Then shall the wicked go away into outer

darkness.' Brethren, men being what they are, and God being what He is,

there can be no divine message without a side of what the world calls

threatening, or what Ahab called' prophesying evil.' I beseech you, do

not be carried away by the modern talk about Christianity being gloomy

and dark, or fancy that we put a blot and an excrescence upon the pure

religion of the Man of Nazareth, when we speak of the death that

follows sin, and of the darkness into which unbelief carries a man.

III. Once more, let me say a word about the intense folly of such an

attitude.

Ahab hated Micaiah. Why? Because Micaiah told him what would come to

him as the fruit of his own actions. That was foolish. It is no less

foolish for people to take up a position of dislike, and to turn away

from the gospel of Jesus Christ because it speaks in like manner. I

said that men are very foolish animals; there is surely nothing in all

the annals of human stupidity more stupid than to be angry with the

word that tells you the truth about what you are bringing down upon

your heads. It is absurd, because Micaiah did not make the evil, but

Ahab made it; and Micaiah's business was only to tell him what he was

doing. It is absurd, because the only question to be asked is. Are the

warnings true? are the threatenings representations of what really will

come? are the prohibitions reasonable? And it is absurd, because, if

these things are so--if it is true that the soul that sinneth dies, and

will die; if it is true that you, who have heard of the name and the

salvation of Jesus Christ over and over again, and have turned away

from it, will, if you continue in that negligence and unbelief, reap

bitter fruits here and hereafter therefrom--if these things are true,

surely the man that tells you so, and the gospel that tells you so,

deserve better treatment than Ahab's petulant hatred or your stolid

indifference and neglect.

Would you think it wise for a sea-captain to try to take the clapper

out of the bell that floats and tolls above a shoal on which his ship

will be wrecked if it strikes? Would it be wise to put out the

lighthouse lamps, and then think that you had abolished the reef? Does

the signalman with his red flag make the danger of which he warns, and

is it not like a baby to hate and to neglect the message that comes to

you and says, Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die'?

IV. So, lastly, I notice the end of this foolish attitude.

Ahab was told in plain words by Micaiah, before the interview closed,

that he would never come back again in peace. He ordered the bold

prophet into prison, and rode away gaily, no doubt, to his campaign.

Weak men are very often obstinate, because they are not strong enough

to rise to the height of changing a purpose when reason condemns it.

This weak man was always obstinate in the wrong place, as so many of us

are. So away he went, down from Samaria, across the plain, down to the

fords of the Jordan. But when he had crossed to the other side, and was

coming near his objective point, the memories of Micaiah in prison at

Samaria began to sit heavy on his soul.

So he tried to deceive divine judgment, and got up an ingenious scheme

by which his ally was to go into the field in royal pomp, and he to

slip into it disguised. A great many of us try to hoodwink God, and it

does not answer. The man who drew the bow at a venture' had his hand

guided by a higher Hand. Ahab was plated all over with iron and brass,

but there is always a crevice through which God's arrow can find its

way; and, where God's arrow finds its way, it kills. When the night

fell, he was lying dead on his chariot floor, and the host was

scattered, and Micaiah, the prisoner, was avenged; and his word had

taken hold on the despiser of it.

So it always will be. So it will be with us, dear brethren, if we do

not give heed to our ways and listen to the word which may be bitter in

the mouth, but, eaten, turns sweet as honey. Nailing the index of the

barometer to set fair' will not keep off the thunderstorm, and no

negligence or dislike of divine threatenings will arrest the slow,

solemn march, inevitable as destiny, of the consequences of our doings.

Things will be as they will be. Believed or unbelieved, the avalanche

will come.

Dear brethren, there is one way to get Micaiah on your side. Listen to

him, and then he will speak good to you, and not what you foolishly

call evil. Let God's word convince you of sin. Let it bring you to the

Cross for pardon. Jesus Christ addresses each of us in the Apostle's

words: Am I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?'

The sternest threatenings in the Bible come from the lips of that

infinite Love. If you will listen to Him, if you will yield yourselves

to Him, if you will take Him for your Saviour and your Lord, if you

will cast your confidence and anchor your love upon Him, if you will

let Him restrain you, if you will consult Him about what He would have

you do, if you will accept His prohibitions as well as His permissions,

then His word and His act to you, here and hereafter, will be only good

and not evil, all the days of your life.

Remember Ahab lying dead on the floor of his chariot in a pool of his

own blood, and bethink yourselves of what despising the threatenings,

and turning away from the rebukes and prohibitions of the divine word,

come to. These threatenings are spoken that they may never need to be

put in effect. If you give heed to them they will never be put in

effect in regard to you, if you neglect them and will none of' God's

reproof,' they will come down on you like a mighty rock loosed from the

mountain, and will grind you to powder.

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THE SECOND BOOK OF KINGS

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THE CHARIOT OF FIRE

And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by

a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2. And Elijah

said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to

Beth-el. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul

liveth, I will not leave thee. 80 they went down to Beth-el 3, And the

sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha and said

unto him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy

head to-day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 4. And

Elijah laid unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord

hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy

soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. 5. And the

sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and laid unto

him, Knowest thou that the Lord will take away thy master from thy head

to-day? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 6. And

Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here: for the Lord hath sent

me to Jordan. And he said, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth,

I will not leave thee. And they two went on. 7. And fifty men of the

eons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two

stood by Jordan. 8. And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it

together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and

thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. 9. And it came to

pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what

I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said,

I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. 10. And he

said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I

am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not

be so. 11. And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked,

that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and

parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into

heaven.'--2 KINGS ii. 1-11.

Elijah's end is in keeping with his career. From his first abrupt

appearance it had been fitly symbolised by the stormy wind and flaming

fire which he heard and saw at Horeb, and now these were to be the

vehicles which should sweep him into the heavens. He came like a

whirlwind, he burned like a fire, and in fire and whirlwind he

disappeared. The story is wonderful in pathos and simplicity. Surely

never was such a miracle told so quietly. The actual ascension is

narrated in a sentence. Its preliminaries take up the rest of this

narrative.

I. This journey from Gilgal to the eastern side of Jordan is minutely

described in its stages. Apparently this Gilgal is not the well-known

place so called, which was down in the Jordan valley close to Jericho,

else the road from it to Bethel could not have been called a going down

(v. 2). It probably lay to the north of Bethel, which would then be

between it and Jericho, where the Jordan was to be passed. Elijah was

not sent on an aimless round of farewell visits, but by the direct road

to his destination. Note that he and Elisha and the sons of the

prophets' all know that he is near his end. How this came about we are

not told, and need not speculate; but though all knew, none seems to

have known that the others knew. Elijah does not explain to Elisha why

he wished him to stay behind, nor Elisha to Elijah why he was so

resolved to keep by him. The knowledge and the silence would give

peculiar solemnity and sweet bitterness to these last hours. How often

a similar combination weighs on the hearts of a household, who all know

that a dear one is soon to be taken away, and yet can only be silent

about what is uppermost in their thoughts!

Why did Elijah wish Elisha to stay behind? Apparently to spare him the

pain of seeing his master depart. With loving concealment, he tried to

make Elisha suppose that his errand to Bethel and then to Jericho was

but a common one, to be soon despatched. It was a little touch of

tenderness in the strong, rough man. Note, too, the gradual disclosure

to Elijah of the places to which he was to go. He is only bid to go to

Bethel, and not till he gets there is he further sent on to Jericho,

and, presumably, only when there is directed to cross Jordan. God does

not show all the road at once, even if it lead to glory, but step by

step, and a second stage only when we have obediently traversed the

first. We get light as we go. Elisha's clinging to his master till the

very last is but too intelligible to many of us who have gone through

the same sorrow, and counted each moment of companionship with some

dear one about to leave earth as priceless gain, to be treasured in the

sacredest recesses of memory for evermore.

It has been thought that the object of the visits to Bethel and Jericho

was to give parting directions to the schools of the prophets at each

place; but that is read into the narrative, which gives no hint that

Elijah had any communication with these. Rather the contrary is

implied, both in the fact that the sons of the prophets' came to the

travellers, not the travellers to them, and in their addressing Elisha,

as if some awe of the master kept them from speaking to him. An Elijah

marching to his chariot of fire was not a man for raw youths to

approach lightly. Their question is met by Elisha with curtness and

scant courtesy, which indicates that it was asked in no sympathetic

spirit, but from mere love of telling bad news, and of vulgar

excitement. Even the gentle Elisha is stirred to rebuke the gossiping

chatterers, who intrude their curiosity into that sacred hour. There

are abundance of such busy-bodies always ready to buzz about any

bleeding heart, and sorrow has often to be stern in order to be

unmolested.

II. The second stage is the passage of Jordan. The verbal repetition of

the same dialogue at Jericho as at Bethel increases the impression of

prolonged loving struggle between the two prophets. At last, they stand

on the western bank of Jordan, at their feet the spot where the

hurrying river had been stayed by the ark till the tribes had passed

over, before them the mountains bordering Elijah's homeland of Gilead

on the left, and away on the right the lone peak where Moses had died

by the mouth of the Lord.' The soil was redolent of the miracles of the

Mosaic age, and the dividing of the waters by Elijah is meant to bring

the present into vital connection with that past, and to designate him

as parallel with the former leader. Note the vigour with which he

twists his characteristic mantle into a kind of rod, and strikes the

waters strongly. The repetition of the former miracle is a sign that

the unexhausted Power which wrought it is with Elijah. The God of

yesterday is the God of to-day, and nothing that was done in the past

but will be repeated in essence, though not in form, in the present. As

we have heard so have we seen.' The former miracle had been done for a

nation; this is performed for two men. It teaches the preciousness of

His individual servants in God's eyes. The former had been done through

the ark; this, by the prophet's mantle. Power is lodged in the faithful

messenger. God's strength dwells in those who love Him. The former

miracle had been the close of the desert wanderings and the gateway to

Canaan. Though Elijah's face is turned in the opposite direction, does

not its repetition suggest that for him, too, the impending translation

was to be the end of wilderness weariness and toil, and the entrance on

rest?

III. Elisha's request is the next stage in the story. How far they two

went on' is not told. The Bible does not foster the craving to know the

exact situation where sacred things happened, the gratification of

which might feed superstition, but could not increase reverence.

Possibly they had drawn near the eastern hills, and were out of sight

of the fifty curious gazers on the other hank. Elijah at last spoke the

truth which both knew. How true to nature is that reticence kept up

till the last moment, and then broken so tenderly!--Ask what I shall do

for thee, before.' Probably he did not mean any supernatural gift, but

simply some parting token of love; for he is startled at the response

of Elisha. A true disciple can desire nothing more than a portion of

his master's spirit. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his

Master.' They covet wisely and with a noble covetousness who most

desire spiritual gifts to fit them for their vocation. It was an

unworldly soul which asked but for such a legacy.

The double portion' does not mean twice as much as Elijah's portion had

been, but twice as much as other sons of the prophets' would receive.

Elisha reckoned himself Elijah's first-born spiritual son, and asked

for the elder brother's share, because he had been designated as

successor, and would require more than others for his work. The new

sense of responsibility is coming on him, and teaching him his need.

Well for us if higher positions make us lowlier, in the consciousness

of our own unfitness without divine help! Elijah knows that his spirit

was not his to give, and can only refer his successor to the Fountain

from which he had drawn; for the sign which he gives is obviously not

within his power to determine. If the Lord shows the ascending master

to him who is left, He will give the servant his desire.

A portion of their spirit' is the very thing which teachers and

prophets cannot give. They may give their systems or their methods,

their favourite ideas or cut-and-dry maxims and principles, and so

leave a race of pygmies who give themselves airs as being their

disciples, but their spirit they cannot impart. Contrast with this

limitation of power confessed by Elijah, His consciousness who breathed

on eleven poor men, and said, Receive ye the Holy Ghost.' No man could

say that without absurdity or blasphemy. The gift impossible to man is

the very characteristic gift of Jesus, who has power over the Spirit of

holiness.' Must He not thereby be declared to be the Son of God'?

IV. The climax of this lesson is that stupendous scene of the

translation. Note how the Behold' suggests the suddenness of the

appearance of the fiery chariot, which came flaming between the two men

eagerly talking, and drove them apart. The description of the

departure, in its brevity and incompleteness, sounds like the report of

the only eye-witness, who had the fiery chariot between him and Elijah,

and was too bewildered to see precisely what happened. All he knew was

the sudden appearance of the fiery equipage, and then that, suddenly,

and apparently swiftly, a rushing mighty wind swept away chariot and

prophet into the heavens. He saw it, as the next verse after this

passage tells us, only long enough to break into one rapturous and yet

lamenting cry, and then all vanished, and he stood alone with an

apparently empty heaven above him, the whirlwind sunk to calm, and

Elijah's mantle at his feet.

The teaching of the event is plain. As for the pre-Mosaic ages the

translation of Enoch, and for the earlier Mosaic epoch the mysterious

death of Moses, so for the prophetic period the carrying to heaven of

Elijah, witnessed of a life beyond death, and of death as the wages of

sin, which God could remit, if He willed, in the case of faithful

service. Enoch and Elijah were led round the head of the valley on the

heights, and reached the other side without having to go down into the

cold waters flowing in the bottom; and though we cannot tread their

path, the joy of their experience has not ceased to be a joy to us, if

we walk with God. Death is still the coming of the chariot and horses

of fire to bear the believer home. The same exclamation which fell from

Elisha's lips, as he saw the chariot sweep up the sky, was spoken over

him as he lay sick of the sickness whereof he should die.'

But the most instructive view of Elijah's translation is its parallel

and contrast with Christ's Ascension. The one was by outward means; the

other by inward energy. Storm and fire bore Elijah up into a region

strange to him. Christ ascended up where He was before,' returning by

the propriety of His nature to His eternal dwelling-place. The one is

accomplished with significant disturbance, of whirlwind and flame; the

other is gentle, like the life which it closed, and the last sight of

Him was with extended hands of blessing. Each life closed in a manner

corresponding to its character. The one was swift and sudden. The other

was a slow, solemn motion, vividly described as being borne upwards'

and as going into heaven.' The one bore a mortal into heaven.' In the

other, the Son of God, our great High Priest, hath passed through the

heavens,' and now, far above them all, He is Head over all things.'

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THE TRANSLATION OF ELIJAH AND THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold,

there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them

both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.'--2 KINGS

ii. 11.

And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them,

and carried up into heaven.'--LUKE xxiv. 51.

These two events, the translation of Elijah and the Ascension of our

Lord, have sometimes been put side by side in order to show that the

latter narrative is nothing but a variant' of the former. See, it is

said, the source of your New Testament story is only the old legend

shaped anew by the wistful regrets of the early disciples. But to me it

seems that the simple comparison of the two narratives is sufficient to

bring out such fundamental difference in the ideas which they

respectively embody as amount to opposition, and make any such theory

of the origin of the latter absurdly improbable, I could wish no better

foil for the history of the Ascension than the history of Elijah's

rapture. The comparison brings out contrasts at every step, and there

is no readier way of throwing into strong relief the meaning and

purpose of the former, than holding up beside it the story of the

latter. The real parallel makes the divergences the more remarkable,

for likeness sharpens our perception of unlikeness, and no contrast is

so forcible as the contrast of things that correspond. I am much

mistaken if we shall not find almost every truth of importance

connected with our Lord's Ascension emphasised for us by the comparison

to which we now proceed.

I. The first point which may be mentioned is the contrast between the

manner of Elijah's translation, and that of our Lord's Ascension.

It is perhaps not without significance that the place of the one event

was on the uplands or in some of the rocky gorges beyond Jordan, and

that of the other, the slopes of Olivet above Bethany. The lonely

prophet, who had burst like a meteor on Israel from the solitudes of

Gilead, whose fervour had ever and again been rekindled by return to

the wilderness, whose whole career had isolated him from men, found the

fitting place for that last wonder amidst the stern silence where he

had so often sought asylum and inspiration. He was close to the scenes

of mighty events in the past. There, on that overhanging peak, the

lawgiver whose work he was continuing, and with whom he was to be so

strangely associated on the Mount of Transfiguration, had made himself

ready for his lonely grave. Here at his feet, the river had parted for

the victorious march of Israel. Away down on his horizon the sunshine

gleamed on the waters of the Dead Sea; and thus, on his native soil,

surrounded by memorials of the Law which he laboured to restore, and of

the victories which he would fain have brought back, and of the

judgments which he saw again impending over Israel, the stern, solitary

ascetic, the prophet of righteousness, whose single arm stayed the

downward course of a nation, passed from his toil and his warfare.

What a different set of associations cluster round the place of

Christ's Ascension--Bethany,' or, as it is more particularly specified

in the Acts, Olivet'! In the very heart of the land, close by and yet

out of sight of the great city, in no wild solitude, but perhaps in

some dimple of the hill, neither shunning nor courting spectators, with

the quiet home where He had rested so often in the little village at

their feet there, and Gethsemane a few furlongs off, in such scenes did

the Christ whose delights were with the sons of men,' and His life

lived in closest companionship with His brethren, choose the place

whence He should ascend to their Father and His Father.' Nor perhaps

was it without a meaning that the Mount which received the last print

of His ascending footstep was that which a mysterious prophecy

designated as destined to receive the first print of the footstep of

the Lord coming at a future day to end the long warfare with evil.

But more important than the localities is the contrasted manner of the

two ascents. The prophet's end was like the man. It was fitting that he

should be swept up the skies in tempest and fire. The impetuosity of

his nature, and the stormy energy of his career, had already been

symbolised in the mighty and strong wind which rent the rocks, and in

the fire that followed the earthquake; and similarly nothing could be

more appropriate than that sudden rapture in storm and whirlwind,

escorted by the flaming chivalry of heaven.

Nor is it only as appropriate to the character of the prophet and his

work that this tempestuous translation is noteworthy. It also suggests

very plainly that Elijah was lifted to the skies by power acting on him

from without. He did not ascend; he was carried up; the earthly frame

and the human nature had no power to rise. No man hath ascended into

heaven.' The two men of whom the Old Testament speaks were alike in

this, that God took them.' The tempest and the fiery chariot tell us

how great was the exercise of divine power which bore the gross

mortality thither, and how unfamiliar was the sphere into which it

passed.

How full of the very spirit of Christ's whole life is the contrasted

manner of His Ascension! The silent gentleness, which did not strive

nor cry nor cause His voice to be heard in the streets, marks Him even

in that hour of lofty and transcendent triumph. There is no outward

sign to accompany His slow upward movement through the quiet air. No

blaze of fiery chariots, nor agitation of tempest is needed to bear Him

heavenwards. The outstretched hands drop the dew of His benediction on

the little company, and so He floats upward, His own will and

indwelling power the royal chariot which bears Him, and calmly leaves

the world and goes unto the Father.' The slow, continuous movement of

ascent is emphatically made prominent in the brief narratives, both by

the phrase in Luke, He was carried up,' which expresses continuous

leisurely motion, and by the picture in the Acts, of the disciples

gazing into heaven as He went up,' in which latter word is brought out,

not only the slowness of the movement, but its origin in His own will

and its execution by His own power.

Nor is this absence of any vehicle or external agency destroyed by the

fact that a cloud' received Him out of their sight, for its purpose was

not to raise Him heavenward, but to hide Him from the gazers' eyes,

that He might not seem to them to dwindle into distance, but that their

last look and memory might be of His clearly discerned and loving face.

Possibly, too, it may be intended to remind us of the cloud which

guided Israel, the glory which dwelt between the cherubim, the cloud

which overshadowed the Mount of Transfiguration, and to set forth a

symbol of the Divine Presence welcoming to itself, His battle fought,

the Son of His love.

Be that as it may, the manner of our Lord's Ascension by His own

inherent power is brought into boldest relief when contrasted with

Elijah's rapture, and is evidently the fitting expression, as it is the

consequence, of His sole and singular divine nature. It accords with

His own mode of reference to the Ascension, while He was on earth,

which ever represents Him not as being taken, but as going: I leave the

world and go to the Father.' I ascend to My Father and your Father.'

The highest hope of the devoutest souls before Him had been, Thou wilt

afterwards take me to glory.' The highest hope of devout souls since

Him has been, We shall be caught up to meet the Lord.' But this Man

ever speaks of Himself as able when He will, by His own power, to rise

where no man hath ascended. His divine nature and pre-existence shine

clearly forth, and as we stand gazing at Him blessing the world as He

rises into the heavens, we know that we are looking on no mere

mysterious elevation of a mortal to the skies, but are beholding the

return of the Incarnate Lord, who willed to tarry among our earthly

tabernacles for a time, to the glory where He was before, His own calm

home, His habitation from eternity.'

II. Another striking point of contrast embraces the relation which

these two events respectively bear to the life's work which had

preceded them.

The falling mantle of Elijah has become a symbol known to all the

world, for the transference of unfinished tasks and the appointment of

successors to departed greatness. Elisha asked that he might have a

double portion of his master's spirit, not meaning twice as much as his

master had had, but the eldest son's share of the father's possessions,

the double of the other children's portion. And, though his master had

no power to bestow the gift, and had to reply as one who has nothing

that he has not received, and cannot dispose of the grace that dwells

in him, the prayer was answered, and the feebler nature of Elisha was

fitted for the continuance of the work which Elijah left undone.

The mantle that passed from one to the other was the symbol of office

and authority transferred; the functions were the same, whilst the

holders had changed. The sons of the prophets bow before the new

master; the spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha.'

So the world goes on. Man after man serves his generation by the will

of God, and is gathered to his fathers; and a new arm grasps the mantle

to smite Jordan, and a new voice speaks from his empty place, and men

recognise the successor, and forget the predecessor.

We turn to Christ's Ascension, and there we meet with nothing analogous

to this transference of office. No mantle falling from His shoulders

lights on any of that group, none are hailed as His successors. What He

has done bears and needs no repetition whilst time shall roll, whilst

eternity shall last. His work is unique: the help that is done on

earth, He doeth it all Himself.' His Ascension completed the witness of

heaven, begun at His resurrection, that He has offered one sacrifice

for sins, for ever.' He has left no unfinished work which another may

perfect. He has done no work which another may do again for new

generations. He has spoken all truth, and none may add to His words. He

has fulfilled all righteousness, and none may better His pattern. He

has borne all the world's sin, and no time can waste the power of that

sacrifice, nor any man add to its absolute sufficiency. This King of

men wears a crown to which there is no heir. This Priest has a

priesthood which passes to no other. This Prophet' does live for ever,'

The world sees all other guides and helpers pass away, and every man's

work is caught up by other hands and carried on after he drops it, and

the short memories and shorter gratitudes of men turn to the rising

sun; but one Name remains undimmed by distance, and one work remains

unapproached and unapproachable, and one Man remains whose office none

other can hold, whose bow none but He can bend, whose mantle none can

wear. Christ has ascended up on high and left a finished work for all

men to trust, for no man to continue.

III. Whilst our Lord's Ascension is thus marked as the seal of a work

in which He has no successor, it is also emphatically set forth, by

contrast with Elijah's translation, as the transition to a continuous

energy for and in the world.

Clearly the other narrative derives all its pathos from the thought

that Elijah's work is done. His task is over, and nothing more is to be

hoped for from him. But that same absence from the history of Christ's

Ascension, of any hint of a successor, to which we have referred in the

previous remarks, has an obvious bearing on His present relation to the

world as well as on the completeness of His unique past work.

When Christ ascended up on high, He relinquished nothing of His

activity for us, but only cast it into a new form, which in some sense

is yet higher than that which it took on earth. His work for the world

is in one aspect completed on the Cross, but in another it will never

be completed until all the blessings which that Cross has lodged in the

midst of humanity, have reached their widest possible diffusion and

their highest possible development. Long ages ago He cried, It is

finished,' but we may be far yet from the time when He shall say, It is

done'; and for all the slow years between His own word gives us the law

of His activity, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.'

Christ's Ascension is no withdrawal of the Captain of our salvation

from the field where we are left to fight, nor has He gone up to the

mountain, leaving us alone to tug at the oar, and shiver in the cold

night air. True, there may seem a strange contrast between the present

condition of the Lord who was received up into heaven, and sitteth on

the right hand of God,' and that of the servants wandering through the

world on His business; but the contrast is harmonised by the next

words, the Lord also working with them.' Yes, He has gone up to sit at

the right hand of God. That session at God's right hand to which the

Ascension is chiefly of importance as the transition, means the repose

of a perfected redemption, the communion of the Son with the Father,

the exercise of all the omnipotence of God, the administration of the

world's history. He has ascended that He might fill all things, that He

might pour out His Spirit upon us, that the path to God may be trodden

by our lame feet, that the whole resources of the divine nature may be

wielded by the hands that were nailed to the Cross, that the mighty

purpose of salvation may be fulfilled.

Elijah knew not whether his spirit could descend upon his follower. But

Christ, though, as we have said, He left no legacy of falling mantle to

any, left His Spirit to His people. What Elisha gained, Elijah lost.

What Elisha desired, Elijah could not give nor guarantee. How firm and

assured beside Elijah's dubious Thou hast asked a hard thing,' and his

If thou see me, it shall be so,' is Christ's It is expedient for you

that I go away. For if I go not away the Comforter will not come, but

if I depart, I will send Him unto you.'

Manifold are the forms of that new and continuous activity of Christ

into which He passed when He left the earth: and as we contrast these

with the utter helplessness any longer to counsel, rebuke or save, to

which death reduces those who love us best, and to which even his

glorious rapture into the heavens brought the strong prophet of fire,

we can take up, with a new depth of meaning, the ancient words that

tell of Christ's exclusive prerogative of succouring and inspiring from

within the veil: Thou hast ascended on high; Thou hast led captivity

captive; Thou hast received gifts for men.'

IV. The Ascension of Christ is still further set forth, in its very

circumstances, by contrast with Elijah's translation, as bearing on the

hopes of humanity for the future.

The prophet is caught up to the glory and repose for himself alone, and

the sole share which the gazing follower or the sons of the prophets

straining their eyes there at Jericho, had in his triumph, was a

deepened conviction of his prophetic mission, and perhaps some clearer

faith in a future life. Their wonder and sorrow, Elisha's immediate

exercise of his new power, the prophets' immediate transference of

their allegiance to their new head, show that on both sides it was felt

that they had no part in the event beyond that of awe-struck beholders.

No light streamed from it on their own future. The path they had to

tread was still the common road into the great darkness, as solitary

and unknown as before. The chariot of fire parted their master from the

common experience of humanity as from their fellowship, making him an

exception to the sad rule of death, which frowned the grimmer and more

inexorable by contrast with his radiant translation.

The very reverse is true of Christ's Ascension. In Him our nature is

taken up to the throne of God. His Resurrection assures us that them

which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him,' His passage to the

heavens assures us that they who are alive and remain shall be caught

up together with them,' and that all of both companies shall with Him

live and reign, sharing His dominion, and moulded to His image.

If we would know of what our manhood is capable, if we would rise to

the height of the hopes which God means that we should cherish, if we

would gain a living grasp of the power that fulfils them, we have to

stand there, gazing on the piled cloud that sails slowly upwards, the

pure floor for our Brother's feet. As we watch it rising with a motion

which is rest, we have the right to think, Thither the Forerunner is

for us entered.' We see there what man is meant for, what men who love

Him attain. True, the world is still full of death and sorrow, man's

dominion seems a futile dream and a hope that mocks, but we see Jesus,'

ascended up on high, and in Him we too are made to sit together in

heavenly places.' The Breaker is gone up before them. Their King shall

pass before them, and the Lord at the head of them.'

There is yet another aspect in which our Lord's Ascension bears on our

hopes for the future, namely, as connected with His coming again. In

that respect, too, the contrast of Elijah's translation may serve to

emphasise the truth. Prophecy, indeed, in its latest voice, spoke of

sending Elijah the prophet before the coming of the day of the Lord,

and Rabbinical legends delighted to tell how he had been carried to the

Garden of Eden, whence he would come again, in Israel's sorest need.

But the prophecy had no thought of a personal reappearance, and the

dreams are only dreams such as we find in the legendary history of many

nations. As Elisha recrossed the Jordan, he bore with him only a mantle

and a memory, not a hope.

Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus,

which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as

ye have seen Him go into heaven.' How grand is the use in these mighty

words of the name Jesus, the name that speaks of His true humanity,

with all its weakness, limitations, and sorrow, with all its tenderness

and brotherhood! The man who died and rose again, has gone up on high.

He will so come as He has gone. So'--that is to say, personally,

corporeally, visibly, on clouds, perhaps to that very spot, and His

feet shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives.' Thus Scripture

teaches us ever to associate together the departure and the coming of

the Lord, and always when we meditate on His Ascension to prepare a

place for us, to think of His real presence with us through the ages,

and of His coming again to receive us to Himself.

That parting on Olivet cannot be the end. Such a leave-taking is the

prophecy of happy greetings and an inseparable reunion. The King has

gone to receive a kingdom, and to return. Memory and hope coalesce, as

we think of Him who is passed into the heavens, and the heart of the

Church has to cherish at once the glad thought that its Head and helper

has entered within the veil, and the still more joyous one, which

lightens the days of separation and widowhood, that the Lord will come

again.

So let us take our share in the great joy' with which the disciples

returned to Jerusalem, left like sheep in the midst of wolves as they

were, and let us set our affection on things above, where Christ is,

sitting at the right hand of God.'

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ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION AND ELISHA'S DEATHBED

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of

Israel, and the horsemen thereof.'--2 KINGS ii. 12.

. . .And Joash, the King of Israel, came down unto him, and wept over

his face, and said. O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and

the horsemen thereof.'--2 KINGS xiii. 14.

The scenes and the speakers are strangely different in these two

incidents. The one scene is that mysterious translation on the further

bank of the Jordan, when a mortal was swept up to heaven in a fiery

whirlwind, and the other is an ordinary sick chamber, where an old man

was lying, with the life slowly ebbing out of him. The one speaker is

the successor of the great prophet, on whom his spirit in a large

measure fell; the other, an idolatrous king, young, headstrong, who had

despised the latter prophet's teaching while he lived, but was now for

the moment awed into something like seriousness and reverence by his

death.

Now the remarkable thing is that this unworthy monarch should have come

to the dying prophet, and should have strengthened and cheered him by

the quotation of his own words, spoken so long ago, as if he would say

to him, All that thou didst mean when thou didst stand there in

rapturous adoration, watching the ascending Elijah, is as true about

thee, lying dying here, of a common and lingering sickness. My father,

my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof.' Seen or

unseen, these were present. The reality was the same, though the

appearances were so different.

I We have in the first case the chariot and horsemen seen.

To feel the force of the exclamation on the lips of Joash, we must try

to make clear to ourselves what its original meaning was. What did

Elisha intend when he stood beyond Jordan, and in wonder and awe

exclaimed, The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof'?

It does not seem to me that the interpretation of the words now in

favour is at all satisfactory. It tells us that the expression is to he

taken as in apposition with the exclamation My father, my father'; and

that both the one phrase and the other mean--Elijah! Yet what a

preposterous and strange metaphor it would be to call a man a chariot

and pair, or a chariot and cavalry! It seems to me that the very

statement of this explanation, in plain English, condemns it as

untenable. It is surely less probable that Elisha in that exclamation

was describing Elijah than that he was speaking of that wondrous

chariot of fire and horses of fire that had come between him and his

master, and that his exclamation was one of surprised adoration as he

gazed with wide-opened eyes on the burning angel-hosts, and saw his

master mysteriously able to bear that fire, ringed round by these

flaming squadrons, possibly standing unscathed on the floor of the

chariot, and swept with it and all the celestial pomp, by the

whirlwind, into heaven.

But why should he say the chariot of Israel'? I think we take for

granted too readily that Israel' here means the nation. You will

remember that that name was not originally that of the nation, but of

its progenitor and founder, given to Jacob as the consequence and

record of that mysterious wrestling by the brook. And I think we get a

nobler signification for the words before us if, instead of applying

the name to the nation, we apply it here to the individual. When Elijah

and Elisha crossed Jordan they were not far from the spot where that

name was given to Jacob, the supplanter,' whom discipline and communion

with God had elevated into Israel. And they were near another of the

sites consecrated by his history, the place where, just before the

change of his name, the angels of God met him and he called the name of

the place Mahanaim.' That means the two camps,' the one, Jacob's

defenceless company of women and children, the other, their celestial

guards.

It seems reasonable to suppose that, in all probability, a reminiscence

of that old story of the manifestation of the armed angels of God as

the defenders and servants of His children broke from Elisha's lips. As

he looks upon that strange appearance of the chariot and horses of fire

that parted him and his friend, he sees once more the chariot of Israel

and the horsemen thereof,' the reappearance of the shining armies whose

presence had of old declared that the angel of the Lord encampeth round

about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.' And now the same hosts

in their immortal youth, unweakened by the ages which have brought

earthly warriors to dust and their swords to rust, are flaming and

flashing there in the midday sun. What was their errand, and why did

they appear? They came, as God's messengers, to bear His servant to His

presence. They attested the commission and devotion of the prophet.

Their agency was needful to lift a mortal to skies not native to him.

Strange that a body of flesh should he able to endure that fiery

splendour! Somewhere in the course of that upward movement must this

man, who was caught up to meet the Lord in the air, have been changed.'

His guards of honour were not only for tokens of his prophetic work,

but for witnesses of the unseen world and in some sort pledges, suited

to that stage of revelation, of life and immortality.

How striking is the contrast between the translation of Elijah and the

Ascension of Christ! He who ascended up where He was before needed no

whirlwind, nor chariot of fire, nor extraneous power to elevate Him to

His home. Calmly, slowly, as borne upwards by indwelling affinity with

heaven, He floated thither with outstretched hands of blessing. The

servant angels did not need to surround Him, but, clad no longer in

fiery armour, but in white apparel,' the emblem of purity and peace,

they stood by the disciples and comforted them with hope. Elijah was

carried to heaven. Christ went. The angels disappeared with the prophet

and left Elisha to grieve alone. They lingered here after Christ had

gone, and turned tears into rainbows flashing with the hues of hope.

II. We have in our second text the chariot and horsemen present though

unseen.

We are now in a position to appreciate the meaning of Joash's

repetition to Elisha of his own words, spoken under such different

circumstances.

Elisha was by no means so great a prophet as Elijah. His work had not

been so conspicuous, his character was not so strong, though perhaps

more gentle. No such lofty and large influence had been granted to him

as had been given to the fiery Tishbite to wield, nor did he leave his

mark so deep upon the history of the times or upon the memory of

succeeding generations. But such as it had been given him to be he had

been. He was a continuer, not an originator. There had been a long

period during which he appears to have lived in absolute retirement,

exercising no prophetic functions. We never hear of him during the

interval between the anointing of Jehu to the Israelitish monarchy and

the time of his own death, and that period must have extended over

nearly fifty years. After all these years of eclipse and seclusion he

was lying dying somewhere in a corner, and the king, young but

impressible, although, on the whole, not reliable nor good, came down

to the prophet's home, and there, standing by the pallet of the dying

man, repeated the words, so strangely reminiscent of a very different

event-- My father, my father! the chariot of Israel and the horsemen

thereof!'

And what does that exclamation mean? Two things. One is this, that the

angels of the Divine Presence are with us as truly, in life, when

unseen as if seen. So far as we know, it was only to Elisha that the

vision had been granted of that chariot of fire and horses of fire. We

read that at Elijah's translation on the other side of Jordan, and

consequently at no great distance off, there stood a company of the

sons of the prophets from Jericho to see what would happen, but we do

not read that they did see. On the contrary, they were inclined to

believe that Elijah had been caught up and flung away somewhere on the

mountains, and that it was worth while to organise search-parties to go

after him. It was only Elisha that saw, and Elijah did not know whether

he would see or not, for he said to him, If thou shalt see me when I am

taken from thee, then' thy desire shall be granted.

The angels of God are visible to the eyes that are fit to see them; and

those eyes can always see them. It does not matter whether in a miracle

or in a common event--it does not matter whether on the stones by the

banks of Jordan or in a close sick chamber, they are visible for those

who, by pure hearts and holy desires, have had their vision purged from

the intrusive vulgarities and dazzling brightnesses of this poor, petty

present, and can therefore see beneath all the apparent the real that

blazes behind it.

The scenes at Jordan and in the death-chamber are not the only times in

Elisha's life when we read of these chariots and horses of fire. There

was another incident in his career in which the same phrase occurs.

Once his servant was terrified at the sight of a host compassing the

little city where Elisha and he were, with horses and chariots, and

came to his master with alarm and despair, crying, Alas! my master, how

shall we do?' The prophet answered with superb calmness, Fear not: for

they that be with us are more than they that be with them . . .. Lord,

I pray Thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the

eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full

of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.' They had always

been there, though no one saw them. They were there when no one but

Elisha saw them. They were no more there when the young man saw them

than they had been before. They did not cease to be there when the film

came over his eyes again, and the common round took him back to the

trivialities of daily life.

And so from the mouth of this not very devout king the prophet was

reminded of his own ancient experiences, and invited to feel that,

unseen or seen, the solemn forms stood bright-harnessed,' and strong,

in order serviceable,' ranged about him for his defence and blessing.

And are they not round about us? If a man can but look into the

realities of things, will he see only the work of men and of the forces

of nature? Will there not be--far more visible as they are far more

real than any of these--the forces of the Eternal Presence and ever

operative Will of our Father in Heaven? We need not discuss the

personality of angels. An angel is the embodiment of the will and

energy of God, and we have that will and energy working for us, whether

there are any angel persons about us or not. Scripture declares that

there are, and that they serve us. We may be sure that if only we will

honestly try to purge our eyes from the illusions and temptations of

things seen and temporal,' the mountain or the sick chamber will be to

us equally full of the angel forms of our defenders and companions.

Do we see them for ourselves; and, not less important, do we, like

Elisha, lying there on his deathbed, help else blind men to see them,

and make every one that comes beside us, even if he be as little

impressible and as little devout as this king Joash was, recognise that

in our chambers there sit, and round our lives there flutter and sing,

sweet and strong angel wings and voices? Will anybody, looking at you,

be constrained to feel that with and around you are the angels of God?

Still further, another cognate application of these great words is that

one which is more directly suggested by their quotation by Joash. It

does not matter in what way the end of life comes. The reality is the

same to all devout men; though one be swept to heaven in a whirlwind,

and another lady slowly away in old age, or fall sick of the sickness

wherewith he should die.' Each is taken to God in a chariot of fire.

The means are of little moment, the fact remains the same, however

diverse may he the methods of its accomplishment. The road is the same,

the companions the same, the impelling--I was going to say the

locomotive--power, is the same, and the goal is the same.

Of Enoch we read, He was not, for God took him.' Of Elijah we read, He

went up in a whirlwind to heaven.' Of Elisha we read, He died and they

buried him.' And of all three--the two who were translated that they

should not see death, and the one who died like the rest of us--it is

equally true that God took' them, and that they were taken to Him. So

for ourselves and for our dear ones we may look forward or backward, to

deathbeds of weariness, of lingering sickness, of long pain and

suffering, or of swift dissolution, and piercing beneath the surface

may see the blessed central reality and thankfully feel that Death,

too, is God's angel, who' does His commandments, hearkening to the

voice of God's word' when in his dark hearse he carries us hence.

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GENTLENESS SUCCEEDING STRENGTH

He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back,

and stood by the bank of Jordan; 14. And he took the mantle of Elijah

that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the Lord

God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted

hither and thither: and Elisha went over. 15. And when the sons of the

prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit

of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed

themselves to the ground before him. 16. And they said unto him, Behold

now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray

thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the Lord

hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some

valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. 17. And when they urged him

till he was ashamed, he said, Send. They sent therefore fifty men; and

they sought three days, but found him not. 18. And when they came again

to him, (for he tarried at Jericho,) he said unto them, Did I not say

unto you, Go not! 19. And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold,

I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth:

but the water is naught, and the ground barren. 20. And he said, Bring

me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. 21.

And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in

there, and said, Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters; there

shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. 22. So the

waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha

which he spake.'--2 KINGS ii. 13-22.

The independent activity of Elisha begins with verse 13. How short the

gap between the two prophets, and how easily filled it is! Not the

greatest are indispensable. God lays aside one tool, but only to take

up another. He has inexhaustible stores. The work goes on, though the

workers change, and there is little time for mere mourning, and none

for idle sorrow. Elisha's first miracle is almost an experiment. The

mantle which lay at his feet had been thrown over him by Elijah when he

was called to his service, and it was now a token that office and power

had devolved on him. His first steps tread closely in Elijah's track;

as those of wise and humble men, called to higher work, will mostly do.

The repetition of the miracle by the same means, and the invocation of

the Lord as the God of Elijah,'--a new name, to be set by the side of

the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob'--express the humility which

seeks to shelter itself behind the example of its mighty predecessor.

The form of the invocation as a question indicates that Elisha had not

yet attained certainty as to his power, as not yet having proved it.

Where is the Lord God of Elijah?' is not the question of unbelief, but

neither is it the voice of full confidence, which asks no such

question, because it knows Him to be with it. It is the cry, Oh that

Thou mayest be here, even with unworthy me! and art Thou not here?' The

faith was real, though young, and clouded with some film of doubt. But,

being real, it was answered; and it was because of Elisha's trust, not

Elijah's mantle, that the waters parted. God will listen to a man

pleading that ancient deeds may be repeated to-day, and, by answering

the cry addressed to Him as the God of saints and martyrs of old, will

embolden us to cry to Him as our very own God. We may learn from that

first half-tentative miracle the spirit in which men should take up the

work of those that are gone, the lowliness fitting for beginners, the

wisdom of seeking to graft new work on the old stock, the encouragement

from remembering the divine wonders through His servants in the past,

and the true way to assure ourselves of our God-given power; namely, by

attempting great things for Him, in dependence on His promise.

The miracle was wrought partly for Elisha, and partly for others who

were to acknowledge his authority. These sons of the prophets, who

stood on the eastern bank of Jordan, had probably not been witnesses of

the translation, even if their position commanded a view of the spot.

Purer eyes and more kindred spirits than theirs were needed for that.

But they saw Elisha returning alone, and the waters parting before him,

and, no doubt, as he came nearer, would recognise what he bore in his

hand--Elijah's well-known mantle. They hasten to recognise him as the

head of the prophets, and their acknowledgment accurately expresses his

place and work. Elijah's spirit rests on him, even though the two men

and their careers are very different, and in some respects opposite.

Elisha is distinctly secondary to Elijah. He is in no sense an

originator, either of fresh revelations or of new impulses to

obedience. He but carries on what Elijah had begun, inherits a work,

and is Elijah's Timothy' and son in the faith.' The same Spirit was on

him, though the form of his character and gifts was in strong contrast

to the stormier genius of his mightier predecessor. Elisha had no such

work as Elijah--no foot-to-foot and hand-to-hand duels with murderous

kings or queens; no single-handed efforts to stop a nation from rushing

down a steep place into the sea; no fiery energy; no bursts of despair.

He moved among kings and courts as an honoured guest and trusted

counsellor. He did not dwell apart, like Elijah, the strong son of the

desert; but, born in the fertile valley of the Jordan, he lived a life

kindly with his kind,' and his delights were with the sons of men. His

miracles are mostly works of mercy and gentleness, relieving wants and

sicknesses, drying tears and giving back dear ones to mourners. He is

as complete a contrast to his stern, solitary, forceful predecessor, as

the still small voice' was to the roar of the wind or the crackling

hiss of the flames.

But, nevertheless, there are diversities of operations, but the same

God.' It is well to remember that one type of excellence does not

exhaust the possibilities of goodness, nor the resources of the

inspiring Spirit. The comparative merits of strength and gentleness

will always be variously estimated; but God's work needs them both, and

both may join hands as serving the same Lord in diverse ways, which are

all needed. We should seek to widen our discernment to the extent of

the rich variety of forms of good and of service which God gives.

Elijah and Elisha, Paul and Timothy, Luther and Melanchthon, are all

His servants. Well is it when the strong can recognise the power of the

gentle, and the gentle can discern the tenderness of the strong, and

when each is forward to say of the other, He worketh the work of the

Lord, as I also do.'

The search after Elijah, insisted on by the sons of the prophets, is of

importance only as showing their low thoughts and Elisha's gentle

spirit. He is their head, but he holds the reins loosely. Fancy anybody

urging' Elijah till he was ashamed'! The shame would very soon have

mantled the cheek of the urger. But though, no doubt, Elisha would tell

what had happened, these prophets' only think that Elijah has been

miraculously borne somewhither, as he had been before, and seem to have

no notion of what has really happened. How hard it is to heave heavy

men up to any height of spiritual vision! How vulgar minds always take

refuge in the most commonplace explanations that they can find of high

truths! Gone up to heaven! Not he! He is lying, living or dead, in some

gorge or on some hillside. Let us go and look for him!' There is

nothing on which some people pride themselves more than upon being

practical--which generally means prosaic, and often means blind to

God's greatest deeds. To go scouring wady and mountain for a man who

had been taken up into heaven was practical common sense indeed! But

Elisha's gentleness is to be noted. He let them have their own way.

Often that is the only plan for convincing people of their errors. And,

when the fifty scouts come back empty-handed, all he says is a quiet

Did I no say unto you, Go not?' The servant of the Lord must not

strive,' but in meekness' instruct those that oppose themselves'; and

the effectual instruction is often to let them take their own course.

The miracle of healing the waters is of the beneficent kind usual with

Elisha, inaugurates his course with blessing, and typifies the healing

power which God through him would exert on men. Jericho had been

recently rebuilt in spite of the curse against its builders. The

bitterness of the spring seems to have been part of the malediction;

for men would not be so foolish as to rebuild a city which had only

impure water to depend on. However that may be, the main lesson of the

miracle, beyond its revelation of the spirit of gentle compassion in

Elisha, is the symbolical one. The new cruse and the salt are emblems

of the divine gift which cleanses the human heart. Salt is an emblem of

purification, and its emblematic meaning prevails here over its natural

properties; for the last thing to cure a brackish spring was to put

salt into it. The very inadequacy, as well as inappropriateness, of the

remedy, points the miraculous and symbolical character of the whole. A

jar full of salt could do little to a gushing fountain. But it figured

the cleansing power which God will bring to bear on us, if we will; and

it taught the great truth that sin must be cleansed at the

fountain-head in the heart, not half a mile down the stream, in the

deeds. Put the salt in the spring, and the outflow will be sweet.

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WHEN THE OIL FLOWS

And it came to pass, when the vessels were full, that she said unto her

son, Bring me yet a vessel. And he said unto her, There is not a vessel

more. And the oil stayed.'--2 KINGS iv. 6.

The series of miracles ascribed to Elisha are very unlike most of the

wonderful works of even the Old Testament, and still more unlike those

of the New. For about a great many of them there seems to have been no

special purpose, either doctrinal or otherwise, but simply the relief

of trivial and transient distresses. This story, from which my text is

taken, is one of that sort. One of the sons of the prophets had died in

Shunem. He left a widow and two little children. The creditor,

according to the Mosaic law, had the right, which he was about to put

in practice, of taking the children to be bondmen. And so the

penniless, helpless woman comes to Elisha, as a kind of

deliverer-general from all sorts of distresses, and tells him her

pitiful tale. He asks her what she wants him to do, and she has no

counsel to give. Then the thing to do strikes him. He asks what she has

in the house. It was a poor, bare hovel of a place. There was not

anything in it save a pot of oil, which was all her property. He sends

her to borrow vessels, of all sorts and sizes. He takes the pot of oil,

and shuts the door. Then she sets the two boys fetching and carrying;

and herself taking up the one possession that she has, in faith she

pours; and dish after dish is filled, and still she pours; and they

were all filled, and she kept on pouring. Then she said, Bring some

more'; and the boys answered, There are not any more,' so then the oil

stopped.

There was no very special reason for all this. It is not at all like

most Biblical miracles. I do not suppose it had any symbolical

intention; but I venture to do a little gentle violence to the

incident, and to see in the staying of the oil when no more vessels

were brought to be filled, a lesson addressed to us all, and it is

this: God keeps giving Himself as long as we bring that into which He

can pour Himself. And when we stop bringing, He stops giving.

Now, if I may venture to be fanciful for once, let me tell you of three

vessels that we have to bring if we would have the oil of the Divine

Spirit poured into us.

I. The vessel of desire.

God can give us a great many things that we do not wish, but He cannot

give us His best gift, and that is Himself, unless we desire it. He

never forces His company on any man, and if we do not wish for Him He

cannot give us Himself, His Spirit, or the gifts of His Spirit. For

instance, He cannot make a man wise if he does not wish to be

instructed. He cannot make a man holy if he has no aspiration after

holiness. He cannot save a man from his sins if the man holds on to his

sin with both hands, like some shellfish with its claws when you try to

drag it out of its cleft in the rock. He cannot give the oil unless we

bring the vessels of our hearts opened by our desires.

If God could He would. Ye have not because ye ask not.' But we are

never to forget that God is not led to begin His giving because we

petition Him, but that the infinitude of His stores, and the endless,

changeless, unmotived, perfect love of His heart, make

self-communication--I was going to use a very strong word, and I do not

know that it is too strong--necessary to the blessedness of the blessed

God, and, long before we ever thought of Him, or sought anything from

Him, there was pouring out from Him all the fulness of His love: just

as we may conceive of the sunshine raying out before the orbs that were

to circle round it had been completely shaped, but were still diffused

and nebulous.

But, while God is always giving, our capacity to receive determines the

degree of our individual possession of Him. Or, to put it in the

plainest words--we have as much of God as we can take in; and the

principal factor in settling how much we can take is--how much we wish.

Measure the reality and intensity of desire, and you measure capacity.

As the atmosphere rushes into every vacuum, or as the sea runs up into

and fills every sinuosity of the shore, so wherever a heart opens, and

the unbroken coast-line is indented, as it were, by desire, in rushes

the tide of the divine gifts. You have God in the measure in which you

desire Him.

Only remember that that desire which brings God must be more than a

feeble, fleeting wish. Wishing is one thing; willing is quite another.

Lazily wishing and strenuously desiring are two entirely different

postures of mind; the former gets nothing and the latter gets

everything, gets God, and with God all that God can bring.

But the wish must not only rise to intensity and earnestness, but it

must be steadfast. Suppose these two little boys of the widow had held

their vessels below the spout of the oil-pot with tremulous hands,

while they looked away at something else, sometimes keeping the vessels

right under, and sometimes shifting them on one side, it would have

been slow work filling the unsteadily held vessels. So it is in regard

to receiving God's best gift. Our desires must be unwavering. A cup

held by a shaking hand will spill its contents, or will never receive

them. Let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the

Lord.' The steadfast wish is the wish that is answered.

Is it not a strange indifference to our true good that we who have

learned, as most of us have learned only too well, that in this world

to wish is not to have, should turn away from the possibility that lies

before us each, of passing from this disappointing world of vain

longings into a region where we cannot wish anything that we do not

get? There is only one thing about which it is true that, if you want,

and as much as you want, you will have; and that thing is found when we

turn away our wishes from the false, fleeting, and surface

satisfactions of earth, and fasten them upon God, Who is able to do

exceeding abundantly above all that we . . . think.' Wish for Him, and

you have what you have wished. Wish for anything else, and you may have

it or you may not, but depend upon it the fish is never half as big

when it is out of the water as it felt to be when it was tugging at the

hook.

II. Another vessel that we have to bring is the vessel of our

expectancy.

Desire is one thing; confident anticipation that the desire will be

fulfilled is quite another. And the two do not certainly go together

anywhere except in this one region, and there they do go, linked arm in

arm. For whatsoever, in the highest of all regions, we wish, we have

the right without presumption to believe that we shall receive.

Expectation, like desire, opens the heart.

There are some expectations, even in lower regions, that fulfil

themselves. Doctors will tell you that a very large part of the

curative power of their medicine depends upon the patient's

anticipation of recovery. If a man expects to die when he takes to his

bed, the chances are that he will die; and if a man expects to get

better, Death will have a fight before it conquers him. There are

hundreds of cases, in all departments of life, where he who sets

himself to a task with assured persuasion that he is going to do such

and such a thing will do it. Screw your courage to the sticking-place,

and we'll not fail,' said the heroine in the tragedy; and there is a

great truth in her fierce encouragement.

All these illustrations fall far beneath the Christian aspect of the

thought that what we expect from God we receive. That is only another

way of putting According to thy faith be it unto thee.' It is exactly

what Jesus Christ said when He promised, Whatsoever things ye ask when

ye stand praying believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.'

I am afraid that a great many of us often have expectations fainter

than desires; and that we should be very much surprised if the thing

that we ask for, in the prayers that we so often repeat by rote, were

granted to us. You will hear men praying for holiness, for clean

hearts, for progress in the Christian life, for a hundred other such

blessings. They do not expect that anything is going to come in

consequence, and they would be mightily at a loss what to do with the

gift if it did come. The absence of expectancy in our public petitions

is to me one of the saddest features in the Christian life of this day.

If you expect little, you will get little; and we do expect far less

than we ought. We cannot raise our confident expectations too high; for

He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we ask' as

well as think.' The Apostle has set the limit of our expectations, in

the same context, and here it is: That we may be filled with all the

fulness of God.' There are two limits: one is the boundless

illimitableness of God's perfection, and the possibilities of our

possession of Him are not exhausted until we have reached that infinite

completeness. But then, there is a practical, working limit for each of

us; and that is--what do you desire? and what do you expect? God can

give more than we can ask or think, but He cannot at the moment give

more than we expect or desire.

True, the vessels that we bring to be filled with the oil are not like

the vessels that the fatherless boys brought. These were of a definite

capacity; and the little cup when it was filled was filled, and there

was an end of it. But the vessels that we bring are elastic, and widen

out. The more that is put into them the more they can hold, so that

there is no bound to the capacity of a heart for the reception and

inrush of God; and there will not be a bound through all the ages of a

growing possession of Him in eternity. But for to-day, desire and

expectancy determine the measure of the gift.

III. Lastly, one more vessel that we have to bring is obedience.

If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine.' There is

one case of the general principle that wishes and anticipations are all

right and well, but unless they are backed up and verified by conduct,

even wishes and anticipations will not bring God's gift. For it is

possible for a man who, in his better moments of devotion, has some

desires after a loftier range of goodness and a completer conformity to

God than he ordinarily has, to rise from his knees and rush into the

world, and there live in some lust, or uncleanness, or vice, or

indulgence, or absorption in the cares of this life, in such a way as

that desires and anticipations shall vanish. If we fill our vessels

full, before we take them to the source of supply, with all manner of

baser liquids, there will be no room for the oil. We may contradict and

stifle our desires by our conduct, and by it make our expectations

perfectly impossible to be fulfilled. Are our daily doings of such a

nature as that the Spirit of God, which is symbolised by the oil, can

come into our hearts; or are we quenching and grieving Him so that He

Can but listen at the gate

And hear the household jar within'?

Desire, Expectancy, and Obedience--these three must never be separated

if we are to receive the gift of Himself, which God delights and waits

to give. All spiritual possessions and powers grow by use, even as

exercised muscles are strengthened, and unused ones tend to be

atrophied. It is possible, by neglect of God and of the gift given to

us, to incur the stern sentence passed on the slothful servant--Take it

from him.' By disobedience and negligence we choke the channel through

which God's gifts can flow to us. So, brethren, bring these three

vessels, and you will not go away with them empty. Open thy mouth wide,

and I will fill it.'

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A MIRACLE NEEDING EFFORT

So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel. And it came

to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi

his servant, Behold, yonder is that Shunammite: 26. Run now, I pray

thee, to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well

with thy husband! is it well with the child? And she answered, It is

well. 27. And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught

him by the feet: but Gehazi came near to thrust her away. And the man

of God said, Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the

Lord hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. 28. Then she said, Did

I desire a son of my lord! did I not say, Do not deceive met 29. Then

he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thine hand,

and go thy way: if thou meet any man, salute him not; and if any salute

thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the

child. 30. And the mother of the child said, As the Lord liveth, and as

thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her.

31. And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face

of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he

went again to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

32. And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was

dead, and laid upon his bed. 33. He went in therefore, and shut the

door upon them twain, and prayed unto the Lord. 34. And he went up, and

lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon

his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and stretched himself upon the

child: and the flesh of the child waxed warm. 35. Then he returned, and

walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon

him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes.

36. And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called

her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. 37.

Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the

ground, and took up her son, and went out.'--2 KINGS iv. 25-37.

The story of Elisha is almost entirely a record of his miracles, and

the story of his miracles is almost entirely a record of deeds of

beneficence. Exception has been taken to it on the ground of the

strange accumulation of supernatural works, which have been said to

make it like some mediaeval saint's legend. But why should it not be

true that, after Elijah had proclaimed the truth, his successor's

function was to enforce it chiefly by his acts, and to seek to draw

Israel back to God by the cords of love' and the gentle compulsion of

mercies? The careful consideration of the work of the two prophets

makes the peculiarities of Elisha's perfectly intelligible. This story

of the great lady at Shunem, her joy over her only child and his

piteous death on her knees,' is one of the tenderest and sweetest pages

in the history. Late won and early lost, the poor boy lies pale and

dead on Elisha's bed at Shunem, while the mother hurries across the

plain of Jezreel to Carmel,--a distance of some fifteen or sixteen

miles,--where Elisha was then living, probably near the place of

Elijah's sacrifice. This passage begins with her approach.

I. Note first the meeting (verses 25-28). Somewhere on the slopes of

Carmel, commanding a view of the plain stretching away in the blue

distance eastward, sat the prophet. His eye was keen, though probably

he was now old, and he recognised the lady at a distance, as she rode

swiftly towards the mountain. He appears to have suspected that this

unusual visit meant some calamity, and his gentle heart went out

towards his hostess and friend. Gehazi could not get back sooner than

she could come, but sympathy could not sit passive and watch her

approach. So the instinctively despatched message beautifully witnesses

the prophet's keen affection, and, as it were, the eager leap of his

sympathy. So swift and ready to flash into act is the fellow-feeling of

the Highest with the sorrows of us all; so should be the compassion of

each with another. The higher in gifts or office in the kingdom a man

is, the more is he bound to carry his sympathy in an outstretched hand.

It is worth very little when it comes slowly. It is priceless when it

runs to meet the mourner before she speaks.

The detailed question put into Gehazi's mouth describes the circle

within which this woman's heart moved,--her husband, her child,

herself. If these were well, nothing could be very ill; if ill, nothing

could be well. But the message, which came so warm from Elisha's lips,

had been cooled on the road, and sounded formal from Gehazi. It is hard

for selfish indifference to carry tender words without freezing them.

The bearer of sympathy must be sympathetic. As Gehazi spoiled Elisha's

message, so we Christians too often do our Master's, and cool it down

to our own temperature. The fact that Gehazi had done so is suggested

by the curt answer, Peace!' It is often quoted as the language of

resignation, but it seems much rather to be evasion of the question,

and that because her sorrow shrank from unveiling itself to the

questioner. Nothing makes grief dumb so surely as prying and yet

indifferent intrusion. A tenderer hand than Gehazi's is needed to

unlock the sad secret of that burdened breast.

It was perhaps partly pique at her silencing him, and partly mere

unfeeling attention to propriety,' which made the servant wish to check

the convulsive grasp of the feet, which the master allowed. Underlings

are more careful of what they suppose to be their superior's dignity

than he is. Much is permitted to love and sorrow, by a prophet, which

would be repressed by smaller men. Her soul is bitter within her'

pardons much, and only unfeeling critics will be punctilious in dealing

with even the extravagances of grief. But Elisha had another reason

than pity. He wished to know her pain, and therefore he let her cling

to his feet; for only there would she find her tongue. Does there not

shine through the figure of the gentle prophet the image of the gentler

Christ, who will not have the poorest and foulest spurned from His

feet, though it be a woman who was a sinner,' and lets us come as close

to Him as we will, even to hide our faces on His breast, that we may

pour out all our sorrows and sins to Him?

The limitations of the prophet's knowledge he frankly owns. How much

better would it have been for the Church if its teachers had been more

willing to copy his modesty, and said about a great many things, The

Lord hath hid it from me'!

The mother's answer is indeed the cry of a bitter' heart. Its abrupt

questions and its reticence as to the child's death are pathetically

true to nature, and sound yet across all these centuries as if the

bitter cry were for a grief of to-day. Did I desire a son?' She

upbraids Elisha and Elisha's God for having forced on her an unasked

blessing. Did I not say, Do not deceive me?' She did (verse 16); and

she upbraids Elisha again for a worse deceit than she had meant then,

by mocking her with a gift which was wrenched from her hands so

suddenly and soon. How many a sad heart is to-day tempted to raise this

cry of anguish! And how patient is Elisha with wild words, and how he

discerns, beneath the apparent rough reproach, the misery which it

implies and the petition which it veils! Elisha's Lord is no less

tender in His judgment of our hasty, whirlwind words, when our hearts

are sore; and if only we speak them to Him and cling to His feet, He

translates them into the petitions which they mean, and is swift to

answer the meaning and pass by the sound of our bitter cry.

II. We note the ineffectual experiment of the staff (verses 29-31). The

supposition that Gehazi was sent in such haste with the hope that the

touch of the staff might bring back life, is dismissed as impossible'

by most commentators, who have therefore some difficulty in saying what

he was sent for. Some of the Rabbis answered, To prevent putrefaction,'

which would set in soon on that harvest day. Others say that the

intention was to prevent more life escaping from him.' But dead' is not

usually supposed to be an adjective admitting of comparison. Others

find the reason in the wish to deliver Israel from the superstitious

veneration of such things as the staff, by showing that it was

powerless. But verse 31 plainly implies that the result of Gehazi's

attempt was not what had been expected. Why need there be any

hesitation in taking the natural meaning, and supposing that Elisha

sent his servant quickly, if peradventure' the touch of his staff might

suffice, and followed in person, because he did not know whether it

would. There is nothing unworthy of a prophet who had just confessed

his ignorance in the supposition. His unobtrusive spirit delighted to

hide its power behind material vehicles, as is seen in most of his

miracles; and, if he remembered how he himself, in his early days, had

parted the waters with his master's cloak, he might think it possible

that his servant should work a miracle with his staff.

The Shunemite quotes his own words on that far-off day; and perhaps she

was reminded of them by perceiving the analogy of the two incidents.

But her clinging to Elisha shows her doubt of the success of the

attempt; and she was right. Why did the staff fail? Perhaps because of

its bearer. Gehazi always appears unfavourably, and Elisha's staff

loses its power in such hands. The mightiest instruments are weak when

selfishness and coldness wield them. An unworthy minister can make the

Gospel itself impotent. It is an awful thing to carry the rod of Thy

strength' and to hinder its exerting its energy. But possibly the

non-success of the attempt was meant to teach Elisha and us that

miracles of life-giving are not to be wrought so easily, but need the

effort of the prophet himself. We cannot delegate the work of God, and

no sending of others will do instead of going ourselves. Such things

are not achieved without much personal toil, pains, and self-sacrifice.

III. So we come to the last step, the communication of life (verses

32-37). It was noon when the child died. The mother's journey would

take three or four hours, and the return at least as much. It would

then be dark when the two reached her desolate home. She had laid the

boy on Elisha's bed, as if even that brought her some comfort. It is

difficult to say whether them twain' (verse 33) means him and the

mother, or him and the child; but the expression of the next verse,

went up,' suggests that the prayer with shut door was in the lower part

of the house, and that the mother's cry was joined to the prophet's

petitions. Such prayer is the true preparation for such a miracle.

Beautiful consideration, born of sympathy, led him to shut out curious

onlookers, and then to go up alone to the little chamber where that

pale, tiny corpse lay. No eye but a mother's could have seen what

followed without profanation; and a mother's heart would have been torn

by hopes and fears if she had seen.

The actual miracle is remarkable for two peculiarities--the effort

required and the slowness of the process. Of course, there is a

profound and beautiful use to be made of the prophet's action in laying

himself upon the dead child, mouth to mouth, and hand to hand, if we

regard it as symbolic of that closeness of approach to our nature, dead

in sins, which the Lord of life makes in His incarnation and in His

continual drawing near. It is His own life which Jesus imparts, and it

is imparted because He comes near and touches us. It is the warmth of

His own heart which passes into those who live by derivation of life

from Him. And Elisha may well stand as symbol of Jesus in this miracle.

But besides that use of the narrative, which is no mere fanciful

playing with it, we should also note the difference between the prophet

and Christ in their miracles. Jesus raises the dead by His bare word.

His expressed will is all-sufficient. Elisha prays, and then puts forth

somewhat prolonged efforts, from which at first there is no effect, and

which drain him of force, so that he is obliged to pause and leave the

chamber, and gather himself together for a renewal of them. The ease of

the one sets the difficulty of the other in a strong light. And the

life which came back with a rush, in full stream, at Christ's bidding,

comes only by degrees at Elisha's prayer and work. The one worker is

the Lord of life, who speaks and it is done; the other is but the

channel of power, and the appearance of effort and gradualness in

result is owing to the narrowness of the channel, not to the inadequacy

of the power.

In all Elisha's gentleness and lowliness there is yet a certain dignity

as God's prophet; and it was not fitting that he should come from the

scene of such a miracle with the glow of it upon him, to seek for the

mother. So he summons her by Gehazi, and then, with beautiful delicacy,

leaves her to go alone into the chamber. None are to see the transports

of her joy, not even the author of it. How beautiful, too, are the

quiet words, Take up thy son'! She has no words; but, for all answer,

comes close to him (there is no in' in verse 37), and once again, but

with what different feelings, clasps his feet. Not even Gehazi, or any

other stickler for propriety, has the heart to thrust her back this

time. The story draws a curtain over that meeting in the prophet's

chamber. Sad hearts who have vainly longed for such a moment, can fancy

the rapture. But the day will come, not here, but in the upper chamber,

when parted ones shall clasp each other again; and many a mourner shall

hear Jesus say from the throne what He once said from the Cross, Woman,

behold thy son; son, behold thy mother.'

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NAAMAN'S WRATH

And Elisha sent a messenger unto Naaman, saying, Go and wash in Jordan

seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be

clean. 11. But Naaman was wroth, and went away.'--2 KINGS v. 10, 11.

These two figures are significant of much beyond themselves. Elisha the

prophet is the bearer of a divine cure. Naaman, the great Syrian noble,

is stricken with the disease that throughout the Old Testament is

treated as a parable of sin and death. He was the commander-in-chief of

the army of Damascus, high in favour at Ben-hadad's court; his

reputation and renown were on every tongue, but he was a leper. There

is a but' in every fortune, as there is a but' in every character.

So he comes to the prophet's humble home in Samaria, and we find him

waiting, a suppliant at the gate, with his cavalcade of attendants, and

a present worth many thousands of pounds in our English money.

How does the prophet receive his distinguished visitor? In all the rest

of his actions we find Elisha gentle, accessible, forgetful of his

dignity. Here his conduct would be discourteous if there were not a

reason for it. He is reserved, unsympathetic, keeps the great man at

the staff-end, will not even come out to receive him as common courtesy

might have suggested; sends him a curt message of direction, with not a

word more than was necessary.

And then, naturally enough, the hot soldier begins to explode. His

pride is touched; he has not been received with due deference. If the

prophet would have come out and chanted incantations over him, and made

mystical motions of his hands above the shining patches of his leprous

skin, he could have believed in the cure. But there was nothing in the

injunction given for his superstition to lay hold of. His patriotic

susceptibilities are roused. If he is to be cleansed by bathing, are

not the crystal streams of his own city, the glory of Damascus, better

than the turbid and muddy Jordan that belongs to Israel? So he flounced

away, and would have sacrificed his hope of cure to his passion if his

servants had not brought him to common-sense by their cool

remonstrance. He would have done any great thing which he had been set

to do; he had already done a great thing in taking the long journey,

and being ready to expend all that vast amount of treasure, and so

surely there need be no difficulty in his complying, were it only as an

experiment, with the very simple and easy terms which the prophet had

enjoined.

Now, all these points may be so put as to suggest for us

characteristics of that gospel which is God's cure for our leprosy. And

the whole story shows us as in a glass what human nature would like the

gospel to be, and how we sick men quarrel with our physic, and stumble

at those very characteristics of the gospel which are its main glory

and the secret of its power. My only purpose in this sermon is to bring

out two or three of these as lying on the surface of the story before

us.

I. First, then, God's cure puts us all on one level.

Naaman wished to be treated like a great man that happened to be a

leper; Elisha treated him like a leper that happened to be a great man.

I thought, he will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the

name of the Lord his God.' The whole question about his treatment turns

on this, Whether is the important thing his disease or his dignity? He

thought it was his dignity, the prophet thought it was his disease. And

so he served him as he would have served any one else that in similar

circumstances, and for a like necessity, had come to him.

And now, if you will generalise that, it just comes to this--that

Christianity brushes aside all the surface differences of men, and goes

in its treatment of them straight to the central likenesses, the things

which, in all mankind, are identical. There are the same wants, the

same sorrows, the same necessity for the same cleansing beneath the

queen's robes and the peer's ermine, the workman's jacket and the

beggar's rags.

Whatever differences of culture, of station, of idiosyncrasy there may

be, these are but surface and accidental. We are all alike in this,

that we have sinned, and come short of the glory of God'; and our Great

Physician, in His great remedy, insists upon treating us all as

patients, and not as this, that, or the other, kind of patients. The

cholera, when it lays hold of ladies and gentlemen, deals with them in

precisely the same fashion that it does when it lays hold of waifs on

the dunghill; and a wise doctor will treat the Prince of Wales just as

he will treat the Prince of Wales's stable-boy. Christianity has

nothing to say, in the first place, to the accidents that separate us

one from the other, but insists on looking at us all as standing on the

one level and partaking of the one characteristic. We may be wise or

foolish, we may be learned or ignorant, we may be rich or poor, we may

be high or low, we may be barbarian or civilised, but we are all

sinners. The leprosy runs through us all, according to the diagnosis of

Christianity, and our Elisha deals with Naaman as he deals with the

poorest footboy in Naaman's cavalcade who is afflicted with the same

disease.

Now that rubs against our self-importance; a great many of us would be

quite willing to go to heaven, but we do not like to go in a common

caravan. We want to have a compartment to ourselves, and to travel in a

manner becoming our position. We are quite willing to be healed, but we

would like to be healed with due deference. You are an educated man, a

student; you do not like to take the same place as the most unlettered,

and to feel that the common fact of sin puts you, in a very solemn

respect, upon the level of these narrow foreheads and unlettered

people. And so some of you turn away because Christianity, with such

impartiality and persistency, insists upon the identity of the fact of

sin in us all, and passes by the little diversities on which we plume

ourselves, and which part us the one from the other. Dear brethren, I

am sure that some of my audience have been kept away from the gospel by

this humbling characteristic of it, that at the very beginning it

insists on bringing us all into the one category; and I venture to ask

you to ponder with yourselves this question, Is it not wise, is it not

necessary that the physician should look only at the disease and think

nothing of all the other facts of the patient's character or life?

Surely, surely, it is a fact that we are transgressors, and surely it

is a fact that if we be transgressors that is the most important thing

about us--far more important than all these diversities of which I have

been speaking. They are skin-deep, this is the central truth, that we

have souls which ought to stand in a living relation of glad obedience

to our Father in heaven; and which, alas! do stand in an attitude often

of sulky alienation, often of indifference, and not seldom of

rebellion. If so, then it is both wise and kind to deal with that

solemn fact first. In wisdom and in mercy Christianity deals with all

men as sinners, needing chiefly to be healed of that disease. The

Scripture hath concluded all under sin'--shut up the whole race as in a

great chamber, that so cleansing and forgiveness might reach them all.

They are gathered together as patients in a hospital are gathered, that

their sickness may be medicined and their wounds dressed.

For this impartiality of the gospel, putting us all on one level, and

its determination to deal with us all as sinners, is but the other side

of, and the preparation for, that blessed universality of a sacrifice

for all, and a gospel for the whole world. Do not quarrel with your

physic because the Physician insists upon dealing with you as sick men.

II. Then take another of the thoughts that come out of the incident

before us. God's cure puts the messengers of the cure well away in the

background.

Naaman, heathen-like, wanted something sensuous for his confidence in

the prophet's cure to lay hold upon. If the prophet would only have

come out, and done like the sorcerers and magic-workers of whom he had

had experience; if he would have come weaving mystical incantations,

and calling upon the God whom he worshipped, but whom Naaman did not,

and making passes with his hands over the leprous places--then there

would have been something for his sense to build upon, and he would

have been ready to believe in the prophet's power to cure. But that was

the very thing which the prophet did not want him to believe in. Elisha

desired to conceal himself, and to make God's power prominent. He

wished to cure Naaman's soul of the leprosy of idolatry as well as to

cure his body; and we see, in the sequel of the story, that the very

simplicity of the means enjoined and the absence of any human agency,

which at first staggered the sensuous nature and offended the pride of

Naaman, at last led him to see and confess that there was no God in all

the earth but in Israel. Therefore the prophet keeps in the background.

His part is not to cure, but to bring God's cure. He is only a voice.

He brings the sick man and God's prescription face to face, and there

leaves him. Naaman would have liked to force him into the place of a

magician, in whom miracle-working power resided. Elisha will only take

the place of a herald who proclaims how God's power may be brought to

heal. So men have always sought to turn the messengers of God's cure

into miracle-workers. Making the ministers of God's word into priests

who by external acts convey grace and forgiveness, is a superstition

that has its roots deep in human nature. It is not that the priests

have made themselves so much as that the people have made the priests.

Here is an instance in a rude form of the tendency which has been at

work in all generations, and has been the corruption of Christianity

from the beginning, and is doing mischief every day--the tendency to

place one's confidence in a man who is supposed to be, in some

mysterious manner, the bearer of a grace that will cure and cleanse.

And the prophet's position in our story brings out very clearly the

position which all Christian ministers hold. They are nothing but

heralds, their personality disappears, they are merely a voice. All

that they have to do is to bring men into contact with God's own word

of command and promise, and then to vanish.

Christianity has no priests,' Christianity has no sacraments.'

Christianity has no external rites which bring grace or help except in

so far as by their aid the soul is brought into contact with the truth,

and by meditation and faith is thus made capable of receiving more of

Christ's Spirit. Our only commission is to bring to you God's message

of how you may be healed. When we have said, Wash, and be clean,' as

plainly, earnestly, and lovingly as we can, we have done all our

appointed office. We are heralds, and nothing more. Our business is to

preach, not to do rites, or minister sacraments. Our business is to

preach, not to argue. We are neither priests nor professors, but

preachers. We have to deliver the message given to us faithfully. We

have to ring out the proclamation loudly. The virtue of a town crier is

that he make people hear and understand. The virtue of a messenger is

that he repeats precisely what he was told. And a Christian minister

has to lift up his voice and not be afraid, to see to it that his

speech be plain, and that it do not overlay the message with fripperies

of ornament, or affectations, or personalities, and to plead earnestly

and lovingly with men to come to the divine Healer. John Baptist's

description of himself is true of them. With rare self-abnegation, he

would only reply to the question, Who art thou?' with I am a voice.'

His personality was nothing. His message was all. A musical string

cannot be seen as it vibrates. So the man should be lost in his

proclamation. We are heralds and nothing more, and the more we keep in

the background and the less our hearers depend on us, the better. If

you want priests who will call on the name of their God, and wave their

hands over the place,' and convey grace and healing to you by anything

that they do for or to you, you will have to go beyond the limits of

New Testament Christianity to find them. So men quarrel with their

medicine because their cure is purely a spiritual process, depending on

spiritual forces, and sense cries out for sacred rites and persons to

be the channels of God's healing.

III. And now, lastly, God's cure wants nothing from you but to take it.

Naaman's servants were quite right: My father! If the prophet had bid

thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it?' Yes! Of

course he would, and the greater the better. Men will stand, as Indian

fakirs do, with their arms above their heads until they stiffen there.

They will perch themselves upon pillars, like Simeon Stylites, for

years, till the birds build their nests in their hair: they will

measure all the distance from Cape Comorin to Juggernaut's temple with

their bodies along the dusty road. They will give the fruit of their

body for the sin of their soul. They will wear hair shirts and scourge

themselves. They will fast and deny themselves. They will build

cathedrals and endow churches. They will do as many of you do, labour

by fits and starts all through your lives at the endless task of making

yourselves ready for heaven, and winning it by obedience and by

righteousness. They will do all these things and do them gladly, rather

than listen to the humbling message that says, You do not need to do

anything--wash!' Is it your washing, or the water, that will clean you?

Wash and be clean! Ah, my brother! Naaman's cleansing was only a test

of his obedience, and a token that it was God who cleansed him. There

was no power in Jordan's waters to take away the taint of leprosy. Our

cleansing is in that blood of Jesus Christ that has the power to take

away all sin, and to make the foulest amongst us pure and clean.

But the two commandments--that of the symbol in my text, that of the

reality in the Christian gospel--are alike in this respect, that both

the one and the other are a confession that the man himself has no part

in his own cleansing. And so Naamans, in all generations, who were

eager to do some great thing, have stumbled, and turned away from that

gospel which says, It is finished!' Not by works of righteousness which

we have done, but by His mercy He saved us.' Dear brother, you can do

nothing. You do not need to do anything. It is a hard pill for my pride

to swallow, to be indebted to absolute mercy, which I have done nothing

to bring, for all my hope, but it is a position that we have to take.

Hard to take for all of us, very hard for you who have never looked in

the face the solemn fact of your own sinfulness, and pondered upon the

consequences of that; but most blessed if only you will open your eyes

to see that the stern refusal to accept anything from us as working out

our salvation is but the other side of the great truth that Christ's

death is all-sufficient, and that in Him the foulest may be clean.

Nothing in my hand I bring.'

If you bring anything you cannot grasp the Cross. Do not try to eke out

Christ's work with yours; do not build upon penitence, or feelings, or

faith, or anything, but build only upon this: When I had nothing to pay

He frankly forgave me all.' And build upon this: Christ alone has died

for me'; and Christ alone is all-sufficient. Wash and be clean'; accept

and possess; believe and live!

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NAAMAN'S IMPERFECT FAITH

And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and

stood before him: and he said, Behold, now I know that there is no God

in all the earth, but in Israel: now therefore, I pray thee, take a

blessing of thy servant. 16. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before

whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it; but he

refused. 17. And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be

given to thy servant two mules' burden of earth? for thy servant will

henceforth offer neither burnt-offering nor sacrifice unto other gods,

but unto the Lord. 18. In this thing the Lord pardon thy servant, that

when my master goeth into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he

leaneth on my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon: when I bow

down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy servant in this

thing. 19. And he said unto him, Go in peace. So he departed from him a

little way. 20. But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said,

Behold, my master hath spared Naaman this Syrian, in not receiving at

his hands that which he brought: but, as the Lord liveth, I will run

after him, and take somewhat of him. 21. So Gehazi followed after

Naaman: and when Naaman saw him running after him, he lighted down from

the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? 22. And he said, All is

well. My master hath sent me, saying, Behold, even now there be come to

me from mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give

them, I pray thee, a talent of silver, and two charges of garments. 23.

And Naaman said, Be content, take two talents. And he urged him, and

bound two talents of silver in two bags, with two changes of garments

and laid them upon two of his servants; and they bare them before him.

24. And when he came to the tower, he took them from their hand, and

bestowed them in the house: and he let the men go, and they departed.

25. But he went in, and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto

him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went no

whither. 26. And he said unto him, Went not mine heart with thee, when

the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee? Is it a time to

receive money, and to receive garments, and oliveyards, and vineyards,

and sheep, and oxen, and menservants, and maidservants? 27. The leprosy

therefore of Naaman shall cleave unto thee, and unto thy seed for ever.

And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow.'--2 KINGS

v. 15-27.

Like the Samaritan leper healed by Jesus, Naaman came back to give

glory to God. Samaria was quite out of his road to Damascus, but

benefit melted his heart, and the pride, which had been indignant that

the prophet did not come out to him, faded before thankfulness, which

impelled him to go to the prophet. God's gifts should humble, and

gratitude is not afraid to stoop. Elisha would not see Naaman before,

for he needed to be taught; but he gladly welcomes him into his

presence now, for he has learned his lesson. Sometimes the best way to

attract is to repel, and the true servant of God consults not his own

dignity, but others' good, whichever he does.

I. The first point is the offer and refusal of the gift. The benefited

is liberal and the benefactor disinterested. Naaman was a convert to

pure monotheism. His avowal is clear and full. But what a miserable

conclusion he draws with that therefore'! He should have said,

Therefore I come to trust under the shadow of His wings.' But he is not

ready to give himself, and, like some of the rest of us, thinks to

compound by giving money. When the outward giving of goods is token of

inward surrender of self, it is accepted. When it is a substitute for

that, it is rejected. No doubt, too, Naaman thought that Elisha was,

like the sorcerers of heathenism, very accessible to gifts; and if he

had come to believe in Elisha's God, he had yet to learn the

loving-kindness of the God in whom he had come to believe. He had to

learn next that the gift of God' was not purchased with money' and the

prophet's acceptance of his present would have dimmed Elisha's own

character, and that of his God, in the newly opened eyes of Naaman.

Elisha's answer begins with the solemn adjuration which we first hear

from Elijah. In its use here, it not only declares the unalterable

determination of Elisha, but reveals its grounds. To a man who feels

ever the burning consciousness that he is in the presence of God, all

earthly good dwindles into nothing. How should talents of silver and

gold, and changes of raiment, have worth in eyes before which that

awful, blessed vision flames? A candle shows black against the sun. If

we walk all the day in the light of God's countenance, we shall not see

much brightness to dazzle us in the pale and borrowed lights of earth.

The vivid realisation of God in our daily lives is the true shield

against the enticements of the world. Further, the consciousness of

being God's servant, which is implied in the expression before whom I

stand,' makes a man shrink from receiving wages from men. To his own

Master he standeth or falleth,' and will be scrupulously careful that

no taint of apparent self-seeking shall spoil his service, in the eyes

of men or in the judgment of the great Taskmaster.' Elisha felt that

the honour of his order, and, in some sense, of his God, in the eyes of

this half-convert, depended on his own perfect and transparent

disinterestedness. Therefore, although he made no scruple of taking the

Shunemite's gifts, and probably lived on similar offerings, he

steadfastly refused the enormous sum proffered by Naaman. The labourer

is worthy of his hire,' but if accepting it is likely to make people

think that he did his work for the sake of it, he must refuse it. A

hireling is not a man who is paid for his work, but one who works for

the sake of the pay. If once a professed servant of God falls under

reasonable suspicion of doing that, his power for good is ended, as it

should be.

II. The next point to notice is the alloy in the gold, or the

imperfection of Naaman's new convictions. He had been cured of his

leprosy at once, but the cure of his soul had to be more gradual. It is

unreasonable to expect clear sight, with the power of rightly

estimating magnitudes, from a man seeing for the first time. But though

Naaman's shortcomings are very natural and excusable, they are plainly

shortcomings. Note the two forms which they take,--superstition and

selfish compromise. What good would a couple of loads of soil be, and

could he not have taken that from the roadside without leave? The

connection between the two halves of verse 17 makes his object plain.

He wished the earth for' he would not sacrifice but to Jehovah. That

is, he meant to use it as the foundation of an altar, as if only some

of the very ground on which Jehovah had manifested Himself was sacred

enough for such a purpose. He did not, indeed, think of the Lord' as a

local deity of Israel, as his ample confession of faith in verse 15

proves; but neither had he reached the point of feeling that the Being

worshipped makes the altar sacred. No wonder that he did not unlearn in

an hour his whole way of thinking of religion! The reliance on

externals is too natural to us all, even with all our training in a

better faith, to allow of our wondering at or severely blaming him. A

sackful of earth from Palestine has been supposed to make a whole

graveyard a Campo Santo'; and, no doubt, there are many good people in

England who have carried home bottles of Jordan water for christenings.

Does not the very name of the Holy Land' witness to the survival of

Naaman's sentimental error?

The other tarnish on the clear mirror was of a graver kind. Notice that

he does not ask Elisha's sanction to his intended compromise, but

simply announces his intention, and hopes for forgiveness. It looks ill

when a man, in the first fervour of adopting a new faith, is casting

about for ways to reconcile it with the public profession of his old

abandoned one. We should have thought better of Naaman's monotheism, if

he had not coupled his avowal of it, where it was safe to be honest,

with the announcement that he did not intend to stand by his avowal

when it was risky. It would have required huge courage to have gone

back to Damascus and denied Rimmon; and our censure must be lenient,

but decided.

Naaman was the first preacher of a doctrine of compromise, which has

found eminent defenders and practisers, in our own and other times. To

separate the official from the man, and to allow the one to profess in

public a creed which the other disavows in private, is rank immorality,

whoever does or advocates it. The motive in this case was, perhaps, not

so much cowardice as selfish unwillingness to forfeit position and

favour at court. He wants to keep all the good things he has got; and

he tries to blind his conscience by representing the small compliance

of bowing as almost forced on him by the grasp of the bowing king, who

leaned on his hand. But was it necessary that he should be the king's

favourite? A deeper faith would have said, Perish court favour and

everything that hinders me from making known whose I am.' But Naaman is

an early example of the family of Facing-both-ways,' and of trying to

make the best of both worlds.' But his sophistication of conscience

will not do, and his own dissatisfaction with his excuse peeps out

plainly in his petition that he may be forgiven. If his act needed

forgiveness, it should not have been done, nor thus calmly announced.

It is vain to ask forgiveness beforehand for known sin about to be

committed.

Elisha is not asked for his sanction, and he neither gives nor refuses

it. He dismissed Naaman with cold dignity, in the ordinary conventional

form of leave-taking. His silence indicated at least the absence of

hearty approval, and probably he was silent to Naaman because, as he

said about the Shunemite's trouble, the Lord had been silent to him,

and he had no authoritative decision to give. Let us hope that Naaman's

faith grew and stiffened before the time of trial came, and that he did

not lie to God in the house of Rimmon. Let us take the warning that we

are to publish on the housetops what we hear in the ear, and that, if

in anything we should be punctiliously sincere, it is in the profession

of our faith.

III. The last point is Gehazi's avarice, and what he got by it. How

differently the same sight affected the man who lived near God and the

one who lived by sense! Elisha had no desires stirred by the wealth in

Naaman's train. Gehazi's mouth watered after it. Regulate desires and

you rule conduct. The true regulation of desires is found in communion

with God. Gehazi had a sordid soul, like Judas; and, like the traitor

Apostle, he was untouched by contact with goodness and unworldliness.

Perhaps the parallel might be carried farther, and both were moved with

coarse contempt for their master's silly indifference to earthly good.

That feeling speaks in Gehazi's soliloquy. He evidently thought the

prophet a fool for having let this Syrian' off so easily. He was fair

game, and he had brought the wealth on purpose to leave it. Profanity

speaks in uttering a solemn oath on such an occasion. The putting side

by side of the Lord liveth' and I will run after him' would be

ludicrous if it were not horrible. How much profanity may live close

beside a prophet, and learn nothing from him but a holy name to sully

in an oath!

The after part of the story suggests that Naaman was out of sight of

the city before he saw Gehazi coming after him. The cunning liar timed

his arrival well. The courtesy of Naaman in lighting down from his

chariot to receive the prophet's servant shows how real a change had

been wrought upon him, even though there were imperfections in him.

Gehazi's story is well hung together, and has plenty of local colour'

to make it probable. Such glib ingenuity in lying augurs long practice

in the art. If he had been content with a small fee, he needed only to

have told the truth; but his story was required to put a fair face on

the amount of his request. And in what an amiable light it sets Elisha!

He would not take for himself, but he has nothing to give to the two

imaginary scholars, who have come from some of the schools of the

prophets in the hill-country of Ephraim, thirsting for instruction. How

sweet the picture, and what a hard heart that could refuse the request!

Truly said Paul, The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.' Any

sin may come from it, and be done to gratify it. Honestly if you can,

but get it,' was Gehazi's principle, as it is that of many a man in the

Christian Churches of this day. Greed of gain is a sin that seldom

keeps house alone. Naaman no doubt was glad to give, both because he

was grateful, and because, like most people in high positions, he was

galled by the sense of obligation to a man beneath him in rank. So back

went Gehazi, with the two Syrian slaves carrying his baggage for him,

and he chuckling at his lucky stroke, and pleasantly imagining how to

spend his wealth.

The tower' in verse 24 is more correctly the hill,' and it was probably

there where the little group would come in sight of Elisha's house. So

Gehazi gets rid of the porters before they could be seen or speak to

any one, and manages his load for a little way himself, carefully hides

it in the house, and, seeing the men safely off, appears obsequious and

innocent before Elisha. The prophet's gift of supernatural knowledge

was intermittent, as witness his ignorance of the Shunemite's sorrow;

but Gehazi must have known its occasional action, and we can fancy that

his heart sank at the ominous question, so curt in the original, and

conveying so clearly the prophet's knowledge that he had been away from

the house: Whence, Gehazi?' One lie needs another to cover it, and

every sin is likely to beget a successor. So, with some tremor, but

without hesitation, he tries to hide his tracks. Did not Elisha's eye

pierce the wretched hypocrite as with a dart? and did not his voice

ring like a judgment trumpet, as he confounded the silent sinner with

the conviction that the prophet himself had been at the spot, though

his body had remained in the house? So, at last, will men be reduced to

stony dumbness, when they discover that an Eye which can see deeper

than Elisha's has been gazing on all their secret sins. The question,

Is this a time to receive?' etc., suggests the special reasons, in

Naaman's new faith, for conspicuous disregard of wealth, in order that

he might thereby learn the free love of Elisha's God and of Jehovah's

servant, both of which had been tarnished by Gehazi's ill-omened greed.

The long enumeration following on garments' includes, no doubt, the

things that Gehazi had solaced his return with the thought of buying,

and so adds another proof that his heart was turned inside out before

the prophet.

His punishment is severe; but his sin was great. The leprosy was a

fitting punishment, both because it had been Naaman's, from which

obedient reliance on God had set him free, and because of its

symbolical meaning, as the type of sin. Gehazi got his coveted money,

but he got something else along with it, which he did not bargain for,

and which took all the sweetness out of it. That is always the case.

Ill-gotten gear never prospers'; and, if a man has set his heart on

worldly good, he may succeed in amassing a fortune, but the leprosy

will cleave to him, and his soul will be all crusted and foul with that

living death. How many successful men, perhaps high in reputation in

the Church as in the world, would stand lepers as white as snow,' if we

had God's eyes to see them with!

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SIGHT AND BLINDNESS

Then the king of Syria warred against Israel, and took counsel with his

servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. 9. And the

man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that them pass

not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down. 10. And the

king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and

warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. 11.

Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this

thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew

me which of us is for the king of Israel? 12. And one of his servants

said, None, my Lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel,

telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy

bedchamber. 13. And he said, Go and spy where he is, that I may send

and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

14. Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host:

and they came by night, and compassed the city about. 15. And when the

servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an

host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant

said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? 16. And he answered,

Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with

them. 17. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his

eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man;

and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots

of fire round about Elisha. 18. And when they came down to him, Elisha

prayed unto the Lord, and said, Smite this people, I pray Thee, with

blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of

Elisha.'--2 KINGS vi. 8-18.

The revelation of the angel guard around Elisha is the important part

of this incident, but the preliminaries to it may yield some

instruction. The first point to be noted is the friendly relations

between the king and the prophet. The king was probably Joram, who had

given up Baal worship, though still retaining the calves at Bethel and

Dan (2 Kings iii 2). The whole tone of things is changed from the

stormy days of Elijah. The prophet is frequently an inhabitant of the

capital, and a trusted counsellor. No doubt much of this improvement

was owing to Elijah's undaunted denunciation, but much, too, was due to

Elisha's gentle persuasion. We are often tempted to do injustice to the

sterner predecessors when we see how the gentler ways of their

followers seem to accomplish more than theirs did. Unless winter storms

had come first, spring sunshine would draw forth few flowers. All

honour to the heroes who begin the fight, and do not see the victory.

The Syrian king's way of warfare was not by a regular continued

invasion, but by dashes across the border on undefended places; and

time after time he found himself out in his calculations, and troops

enough to beat him off massed where he meant to strike. No wonder that

he suspected treachery. The prompt answer of his servants implies that

Elisha's intervention was well known by them, and measures the

reputation in which he stood. Let no one suppose that thwarting Syria

was an unworthy use of a supernatural gift. The preservation of Israel

and the revelation of God were worthy ends, and all that is accessory

to a worthy end is worthy. It is foolish to call anything a trifle

which serves a great purpose.

Joram had learned to obey the prophet, and his people and their enemies

had learned that Elisha was a prophet. That was much. He had no great

revelations of the deep things of God to give to his generation or to

posterity, but he gave directions as to practical life which bore on

the wellbeing of the state; and that office was not less divinely

conferred. It is a good thing when God's servants are not afraid to

make their voices heard in politics, and a safeguard for a nation when

their counsels are taken. The quiet prophet was more to Israel than an

army.

The great host' sent to capture Elisha shows the terror which he had

inspired, and the importance attached to getting possession of him. It

is, too, an odd instance of the inconsistency of godless men, in that

it never occurs to the Syrian king that Elisha, who knew all his

schemes, might know this one too, or that horses and chariots were of

little use against a man who had Heaven to back him. Dothan lay on an

isolated hill in a wide plain, and could easily be surrounded. A

night-march offered the chance of a surprise, which seems to have been

prevented by the unusually early rising of Elisha's servant, the young

successor of Gehazi. Apparently he had gone out of the little city

before he discovered the besiegers, and then rushed back in terror.

Note the strongly contrasted pictures of the lad and his master,--the

one representing the despair of sense, the other the confidence of

faith. The lad's passionate exclamation was most natural, and fear

darkening to bewildered helplessness is reasonable to men who only see

the material and visible dangers and enemies that beset every life. The

wonder is, not that we should sometimes be afraid, but that we should

ever be free from fear, if we look only at visible facts. Worse foes

ring us round than those whose armour glittered in the morning sunshine

at Dothan, and we are as helpless to cope with them as that frightened

youth was. Any man who calmly reflects on the possibilities and

certainties of his life will find abundant reason for a sinking heart.

So much that is dreadful and sad may come, and so much must come, that

the boldest may well shrink, and the most resourceful cry Alas! how

shall we do?' It is not courage, but blindness, which enables godless

men to front life so unconcernedly.

How nobly the calmness of Elisha shows beside the lad's alarm! Probably

both were now outside the city, as the immediately following verse

speaks of the mountain as the scene. If so, Elisha had gone forth to

meet the enemy, and that must have brought fresh terror to his servant.

The quiet Fear not!' was of little use without the assurance of the

next clause; for there is no more idle expenditure of breath than in

telling a man not to be afraid, and doing nothing to remove the grounds

of his fear. That is all that the world can do to comfort or hearten.

Fear not?' the youth might well have said. It is all very easy to say

that; but look there! How can I help being afraid?' There is only one

way to help it, and that is to believe that they that be with us are

more than they that be with them.' The true and only conqueror of

reasonable fear is still more reasonable trust. The two parts played by

the servant and the prophet are united in the man who cleaves to Jesus

Christ as his defence. He would not cling so close to Him but for the

fear that tightens his grip. He would tremble far more but for that

grip. He who says in his heart, What time I am afraid, I will trust in

Thee,' will presently get to saying, I will trust, and not be afraid.'

Note, further, the sight seen by opened eyes. Elisha did not pray that

the heavenly guards might come; for they were there already. Nor does

it appear that he saw them; for he did not need that heightened

condition of spiritual perception which appears to be meant by the

opening of the eyes. And what a sight the trembling young man saw!

Where he had seen only barren rock or sparse vegetation, he saw that

same fiery host that had attended Elijah in his translation, now

enclosing the unarmed prophet and himself within a flaming ring. The

manifestation, not the presence, of the angel guards was the miracle.

It was a momentary unveiling of what always was, and would be after the

curtain was drawn again. I suppose that no reverent reader of Scripture

can doubt the existence of angelic beings, or their office to minister

to the heirs of salvation.' To us, indeed, who know Him who is the Head

of all principalities and powers,' the doctrine of angelic ministration

is of less importance than that of Christ's divine help; but the latter

truth does not supersede the former, though its brightness throws the

other, about which we know so much less, into comparative shadow. But

we may still learn from this transient disclosure of the things that

are,' the permanent truth of the ever-active presence of divinely sent

helps and guards, with all who trust in Him.

This manifestation has several features of resemblance to that given to

Jacob, in his most defenceless hour, when he saw beside his unprotected

camp of women and children God's host,' and, in a rapture of thankful

wonder, named the place Mahanaim,'--Two Camps.' The sight teaches us

that God's messengers are ever near, and then most near when needed

most. It tells us, too, that they come in the form needed. They are

warriors when we are ringed about by foes, counsellors when we are

perplexed, comforters when we mourn. Their shapes are as varied as our

needs, and ever correspond to the present distress.' They come in power

sufficient to conquer. There was force enough circling the prophet to

have annihilated all the Syrians. True, they did not draw their

celestial swords, but they were there, and their presence was enough

for the triumphant faith of the guarded men. What living thing could

come through that wall of fire?

Our eyes are blinded and we need to have them cleared, if not in the

same manner as this lad's, yet in an analogous way. We look so

constantly at the things seen that we have no sight for the unseen.

Worldliness, sin, unbelief, sense and its trifles, time and its

transitoriness, blind the eyes of our mind; and we need those of sense

to be closed, that these may open. The truest vision is the vision of

faith. It is certain, direct, and conclusive. The world says, Seeing is

believing'; the gospel says, Believing is seeing.' If we would but live

near to Jesus Christ, pray to Him to touch our blind eyeballs, and turn

away from the dazzling unrealities which sense brings, we should find

Him the master-light of all our seeing,' and be sure of the eternal,

invisible things, with an assurance superior to that given by the

keenest sight in the brightest sunshine. When we are blind to earth, we

see earth glorified by angel presences, and fear and despair and

helplessness and sorrow flee away from our tranquil hearts. If, on the

other hand, we fix our gaze on earth and its trifles, there will

generally be more to alarm than to encourage, and we shall do well to

be afraid, if we do not see, as in such a case we shall certainly not

see, the fiery wall around us, behind which God keeps His people safe.

Note, finally, the blindness. Elisha's dealing with the advancing host

of Syria can only be rightly estimated by looking beyond the limits of

the text. His object was to carry the whole army into Samaria, that

they might there be won by giving them bread to eat and water to drink,

and so heaping coals of fire on their head. The prophet, who was in so

many points a foreshadowing of the gospel type of excellence, was the

first to show the right way to conquer. Nineteen centuries of so-called

Christianity have not brought Christendom' to practise Elisha's recipe

for finishing a war. It succeeded in his hands; for, after that feast

and liberation of a captured army, the bands of Syria came no more into

the land of Israel.' How could they, as long as the remembrance of that

kindness lasted? Pity that the same sort of treatment were not tried

to-day!

The blindness which fell on the Syrians does not seem to have been

total loss of sight,--for, if so, they could not have followed Elisha

to Samaria, nearly fifteen miles off,--but rather an ocular affection

which prevented them from recognising what they saw. It was a

supernatural impediment in any case, however far it extended. God did

according to the word of Elisha,' a wonderful inversion of the ordinary

formula. But that was because Elisha was doing according to the word of

the Lord. The prayers which are according to His will' are the answered

prayers.

They who see not the angels, see nothing clearly. There is a mist over

every eye that beholds only the things of time, which prevents it from

seeing these as they are, and from recognising a prophet when he is

before them. If we would rightly estimate the objects of sense, we must

discern, shining through them, the far loftier and greater things of

eternity. That flaming background is needed to supply a scale by which

to measure the others. The flat plain of Lombardy is most beautiful

when its flatness is seen girdled by the giant Alps, where lies the

purity of the snow which feeds the rivers that fertilise the levels

below.

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IMPOSSIBLE,--ONLY I SAW IT'

Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord,

Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour he sold for a

shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of

Samaria. 2. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man

of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven,

might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine

eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. 3. And there were four leprous men at

the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we

here until we die? 4. If we say, We will enter into the city, then the

famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still

here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of

the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us,

we shall but die. 5. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the

camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of

the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. 6. For the Lord had

made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise

of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to

another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the

Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. 7. Wherefore

they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their

horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their

life. 8. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp,

they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence

silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and

entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid

it. 9. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day

of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning

light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may

go and tell the king's household. 10. So they came and called unto the

porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of

the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man,

but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. 11. And he

called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within. 12.

And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now

shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry;

therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the

field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them

alive, and get into the city 13. And one of his servants answered and

said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain,

which, are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of

Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the

multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and

see. 14. They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent

after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. 15. And they went

after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and

vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the

messengers returned, and told the king. 16. And the people went out,

and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was

sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according

to the word of the Lord.'--2 KINGS vii. 1-16.

The keynote of this incident lies in the promise in the first verse.

The whole story illustrates man's too frequent rejection of God's

promise, and God's wonderful way of fulfilling it.

I. We note first the promise which common-sense finds incredible. It

came from Elisha when all seemed desperate. The wonderfully vivid

narrative in the previous chapter tells a pitiful tale of women boiling

their children, of unclean food worth more than its weight in silver,

of a king worked up to a pitch of frenzy and murderous designs, and

renouncing his allegiance to Jehovah. Such faith as he had was strained

to the breaking point, and his messenger was sent to tell the prophet

that the king would not wait for the Lord any longer.' That was the

moment chosen to speak the promise. It came, as God's helps, both of

promise and act, so often come, at the very nick of time, when faith is

ready to fail and human aid is vain. Before we had learned our hopeless

state, they would come too soon for our good; after faith had wholly

parted from its moorings, they would come too late.

Note the precision and confidence of the promise. The hour of the

fulfilment, and the price of flour and the cheaper barley are stated.

Man's promises are vague; God's are specific. Mark, too, the entire

silence of the promise as to the mode of its fulfilment. Probably

Elisha knew as little as any one, how it was going to be accomplished.

The particularity and vagueness combined are remarkable. A hint as to

how the thing was to be done would have made the belief in the fact so

much easier. Yes, and just because it would have smoothed the road for

worthless belief, it was not given, but the apparently impossible

promise was left in nakedness, for any one who needed sense to animate

his faith, to scoff at. Is not that emphatic assertion of the fact, and

emphatic silence as to the how,' a frequent characteristic of God's

promises? If ever we are kept in the dark as to the latter, it is for

our good, and for the encouragement of our growth in utter dependence

and perfect trust. It is not well for the trusting soul to ask too

curiously about methods intervening between the promise in the present

and its accomplishment in the future. It is better for peace and the

simplicity of our trust, that we should be content to cling to the

faithful word, and to believe. . . that it shall be even as it was

told' us, without troubling ourselves about His way of effecting His

purposes. Passengers are not admitted to the engine-room, nor allowed

on the bridge. Let them leave all the working of the ship to the

captain.

II. The noble who blurted out his incredulity had a great deal to say

for himself from the common-sense and worldly point of view. But he

need not have sneered, in the same breath, at old miracles and new. His

sarcasm about windows in heaven' refers to the story of the flood; and

perhaps there is a hint of allusion to the manna. He neither believed

these ancient deeds, nor the promise for to-morrow. Why not? Simply

because he--wise as he thought himself--could not see any way of

bringing it about. There are many of us yet who have the same modest

opinion of our own acuteness, and go on the supposition that what we do

not see is invisible, and what we cannot do, or imagine done, is

impossible. Why should not the Lord make windows in heaven' if He

please? Or, how does the pert objector know that that is the only way

of fulfilling the promise? He will be taught that he has not quite

exhausted all the possibilities open to Omnipotence, and that something

much simpler than windows in heaven can do what is wanted. Unbelief

which rejects God's plain promises because it does not see how they can

be fulfilled is common enough still, and is as unreasonable as it is

impertinent. Elisha was as ignorant as this nobleman was, of the means,

but his faith fixed its eyes on the faithful word, and trusted, while

sense, self-conceit, and worldliness, a mole pretending to have an

eagle's eye, declared that to be impossible which it could not see the

way to bring about, and thereby exposed only its own blind arrogance.

III. Elisha's answer (v. 2) sounds like Elijah. The utmost gentleness

is stirred to pronounce condemnation on self-confident unbelief, and a

gentler gentleness than Elisha's, even Christ's, shrinks not from

executing the sentence. Is not the sentence on this scoffing lord the

very sentence pronounced ever on unbelief? In his case, it was

fulfilled by the crowd that pressed, in their ravenous hunger, through

the gate, and trod him down; but in ordinary cases, in our days, the

natural operation of unbelief is to shut men out from the fruition, of

which faith is the necessary and only condition. It is no avenging and

arbitrarily imposed exclusion, but the necessary result of self-made

disqualification, which brings on the unbeliever the doom, Thou shalt

not eat thereof.' The blessings of the religious life on earth, and the

glories of its perfection in heaven, are only enjoyable through faith.

These are not so plainly visible to the unbelieving heart as the scene

at the gate was to the nobleman; but, in some measure, even those who

do not possess them do, in some lucid moments, see their worth. It is

one sad part of the sad lives of godless men that they have their

seasons of calm weather, when, in the clearer atmosphere, they catch

glimpses of their true good, but that they yet do not behold it long

and close enough to be smitten with the desire to possess it; and so

the sight remains inoperative, or adds to their condemnation. Not to

taste is the sadder fate, because there has been sight. To have eyes

opened at last to our own folly, and to see the rich provision of God's

table, when it is too late, will be a chief pang of future

retribution,--as it sometimes is of present god-lessness.

IV. Passing over for the present the account of the discovery by the

four lepers, we may next note God's way of fulfilling His promise. A

panic would spread fast in an undisciplined army, and history supplies

examples of the swift change into a mob under the influence of

groundless terror. There is nothing wonderful in the helter-skelter

rush for the Jordan, or in the road being littered with abandoned

baggage. The divine intervention produced the impression which

naturally brought the flight about, and the coincidence of the prophecy

and the panic which fulfilled it stamp both as divinely originated. But

if we looked on events as devoutly, and saw into their true character

as deeply as the author of the Books of Kings does, we should see that

many a similar coincidence, which we trace no farther than to men or

circumstances, was due to the same divine cause which made the Syrians

to hear the noise of a great host.' Track the river of life to its

source, and you come to God.

The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth.' Imaginary terrors are apt to

beset those who have no trust in God. If we fear Him, we need have no

other fear; but if we have not Him for our anchorage, we shall be

driven by gusts of passion and terror. The unseen possibilities of

attack and defeat may well terrify a man who has not the unseen God to

keep him calm.

Windows in heaven, then, were not needed, and the arrogance which said

Impossible!' had not measured all the resources of God. A very wise

scientist here in England proved that the Atlantic could not be crossed

by a steamer, and the first steamer that did cross took out copies of

his book. How foolish men's demonstrations of impossibility look beside

God's deliverances! We have not gone through all the chambers of His

storehouse, and His ways are far above, out of our sight.' Let us hold

fast by the faith that His arm is strong to do whatever His lips are

gracious to engage, nor let our inability to see where the river gets

through the mountains ever make us doubt that it will reach the sunlit

ocean.

V. We may throw together the remaining parts of the incident, as

showing how the fulfilled promise was received. These four lepers had

heard nothing of it, when despair made them venturesome. How reckless

they were, and how they harp on the one gloomy word die'! The thought

was familiar to them, and yet, lepers though they were, life was sweet,

and a chance of prolonging it, even as slaves, was worth trying. They

chose twilight, that they might be unobserved. We can see them creeping

cautiously, with beating hearts, towards the camp, expecting every

moment to be challenged, and possibly slain. How their caution would

diminish and their wonder grow, as they passed from end to end, and

found no one! There stood the horses and asses, left behind lest their

footfalls should betray the flight, and every tent empty of men and

full of spoil. The lepers seem to have gone right through the camp

before they ventured to begin plundering; for the uttermost part' in

verse 5 and that in verse 8 are naturally understood of its opposite

extremities. Then, secure against surprise, they eat and drink as

ravenously as men who had been starving so long would do. Twilight had

deepened into darkness before hunger and greed were satisfied. Not till

then did they awake to their duty; and even when they bethink

themselves, it is fear of punishment, not care for a city full of

hungry men, that moves them. But their tardy awaking to duty is couched

in words which carry a great truth, especially to all who have tasted

the Bread of Life. It is not well' to hold our peace' in a day of good

tidings.' If we have good news, especially the good news, its

possession obliges us to impart it. If we have tasted the graciousness

of the Lord, we are bound to tell of the stores we have found. He that

withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him.' Of how much sorer

punishment. . .shall he be thought worthy,' who keeps to himself the

food of the world?

Lepers were strange messengers of good, but the message graces the

bringer, and they who tell good tidings are sure of a welcome. God does

not choose great men for the heralds of His mercy, but the

qualification is personal experience. These four could only say, We

have seen and tasted,' but that was enough. The king's caution was very

natural, and would have been quite blameless, if God's promise had not

been spoken the day before. But that made the slowness to believe a

sin. Feeling one's way over untried ice is prudent; but if we have

previously been told that it will bear, it proves our distrust of him

who told us. The despatch of the chariots to make a reconnaissance was

needless trouble. But men are always apt to think that faith is but a

shaky ground of certitude unless it be backed up by sense. When God

gives us His word to trust to, we are wisest if we trust to it alone,

and we may save ourselves the trouble of sending out scouts to see if

it is really beginning to be fulfilled. Elisha had no need to wait the

report of the charioteers before he believed in the fulfilment of the

promise, which others had found incredible when spoken, and too good to

be true even when fulfilled. Let us trust God, whether sense can attest

the incipient accomplishment of His words or no.

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SILENT CHRISTIANS

Then they said one to another, We do not well; this day is a day of

good tidings, and we hold our peace; if we tarry till the morning

light, some mischief will come upon us; now therefore come, that we may

go and tell the king's household.'--2 KINGS vii. 9.

The city of Samaria was closely besieged, and suffering all the horrors

of famine. Women were boiling and eating their children, and the most

revolting garbage was worth its weight in silver. Four starving lepers,

sitting by the gate, plucked up courage from the extremity of their

distress, and looking in each other's bloodshot eyes, whispered one to

another, with their hoarse voices: If we say we will enter into the

city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we

sit still here we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto

the host of the Syrians; if they save us alive we shall live; and if

they kill us we shall but die.' So in the twilight they stole away. As

they come near the camp there is a strange silence; no guards, no stir.

They creep to the first tent and find it empty; and then another, and

another, and another, till at last it admits of no doubt that certainly

the enemy has gone, leaving all his baggage behind him, So for awhile

they feast and plunder--small blame to them! And then conscience wakes,

and the same thought occurs to each of them: This is not patriotic;

this is scarcely human; it is a shame for us to be sitting here gorging

ourselves whilst a city is starving within a stone's-throw.' So they

say one to another in the words of my text.

Now these men's consciousness of the obligation imposed upon them by

the knowledge of glad news, their self-reproach for their silence,

their conviction that retribution would fall on them if it continued,

and their resolve therefore to clear themselves, may all be transferred

to higher regions, and may fairly illustrate Christian responsibilities

and duties.

I wish to say one or two very homely, plain things about Christian

men's obligation to speech, and the sin of their silence. My remarks

will have no special reference to any particular forms of Christian

activity, but if I succeed in impressing on any a deeper sense of duty

in reference to declaring the Gospel than they possess, then all forms

of it will be prosecuted with greater vigour and consecration.

I. I wish first to dwell for a moment on that--I was going to use a

plain word and say--hideous; I will substitute a milder term, and

say--remarkable, fact of Christian silence.

I take this congregation as a fair average representative of the

ordinary habitudes of professing Christians of this generation. How

many men and women there are sitting in these pews, who, if I asked

them the question, would say that they were Christians? and what

proportion of these, if I asked them the further question, Did you ever

tell anybody anything about Jesus Christ?' would say, No, never!' I

know this, that in regard to all the recognised and associated forms of

Christian work which cluster round a Christian congregation, it is the

same handful of people that do them all. It is just like the bits of

glass in a kaleidoscope, there are not many of them though you can

shake them up into a great number of patterns, but they are always the

very same bits. So I could go through pew after pew, if it would not be

very personal, and find men and women, one after another--rows of them

--that, so far as any of the united work of a church goes, are

absolutely idle. They are worthy kind of people, too, with some real

religion in them; but yet, partly from shyness, partly from indolence,

partly because (as they think) they have so much else to do, and for a

number of other reasons that I do not need to dwell upon, they fall

into the great army of idlers, and are just so much dead weight and

surplusage, as far as the work of the Church is concerned.

Now I do not mean to say that, because professing Christian people do

not work in any recognised forms of Christian service which are

attached to a congregation, therefore they are not doing anything. God

forbid! There are many of you, for instance, mothers of families, whose

best service is to speak about Jesus Christ to your children, and to

live according as you speak, and that is work enough for you. There are

many more of us, who, for various legitimate reasons, are precluded

from taking part in organised forms of Christian service. Do not so

fatally misunderstand me as to suppose that I am merely beating a drum

to get recruits for societies. What I want to impress upon every

Christian person listening to me now is simply this, the anomaly of the

fact, if it be a fact, that you are a dumb Christian. You can all

speak, if you will; you all have people with whom your speech is

weighty and powerful. There are doors open before each of you. Ask

yourselves, have you gone in at the open doors? or is it true about you

that you have never felt the obligation to make your Master known to

others, or, at all events, have never felt it so strongly that it

compelled you to obey? The strange fact of Christian silence is one

that I emphasise to begin with.

II. Let me say a word next about the sin of this silence.

These four poor lepers had not had much kindness dealt out to them in

their lives, and they might have been pardoned if in their moment of

joy they had remained in the isolation to which they had been condemned

by reason of their disease. But they think to themselves of the hollow

eyes in Samaria there, and the hideous meals, that might stay hunger

but brought no nourishment, and of the king with sackcloth beneath his

royal robes, and, forgetting everything but their abundance and these

people's empty stomachs, they say, Not thus must we do,' as the Hebrew

might be translated, this is a day of good tidings, and we hold our

peace; and that is a sin. And if we continue dumb, then before morning

some kind of punishment will come down upon us.'

Now, let me put what I have to say on this matter into two sentences.

First of all, I say that such silence is inhuman. You would all

recognise that in the case of an actual, literal, instead of a

metaphorical, famine. What would you say about a man who contented

himself with sitting in his own back room, where nobody could see his

abundance, and feasting to the full, whilst his fellow-citizens were

dying of starvation? Why! you would say he was a brute. And if

Christian people believed as thoroughly that men and women without the

Bread of God which comes down from Heaven' were starving and dying of

hunger, as they believe that men without literal bread must die, there

would not be so many dumb ones amongst them; and they would feel more

distinctly than any of us feel now, the responsibility that is laid

upon them, and the inhumanity of the sin.

Dear brethren! God has made this strange brotherhood of humanity in

which we live, all intertwined and intertangled together, mainly in

order that there may be scope for brotherly impartation to the needy,

of the gifts that each possesses. And He has given to each of us

something or other which, by the very terms of the gift and the purpose

of the bestowment, we are bound to impart to others. The meaning of our

being born into the brotherhood of humanity is that God's grace, in

some shape or other, may fructify through us to all; and I say that the

man who possesses any kind of gift, and, especially, God's highest

gifts of wisdom and of knowledge, and most of all, the highest gift of

spiritual knowledge and moral and religious truth, and keeps them to

himself, in his idleness is sinfully active, and in his selfishness is

inhuman and cruel. The very constitution of humanity says to us that we

do not well,' if in the day of good tidings' of any sort we hold our

peace.' The possession of mere physical or abstract truth does not turn

its possessors into its apostles, but the possession of moral and

spiritual truth does. We are, every one of us, responsible for all the

eyes which we could have opened and which are still dark, and for every

soul that gropes in ignorance, if we possess something that would

enlighten its darkness.

But then, further, let me say that this sin of silence is in sheer

contradiction of every principle of Christianity. Why has God given you

His grace, do you suppose? For what purpose comes it that you are

Christians? Were you converted that you might go by yourselves into a

solitary heaven, do you think? Are you important enough to be an

ultimate end of God's mercy? Or are you indeed an end, but only that in

your turn you might be a means of transmitting? Does the electric

influence terminate when it reaches you, or is it turned on to you that

from you it may be passed to others? The very purpose of the existence

of a Christian Church is counterworked and thwarted by dumb Christians.

We Nonconformists can talk abundantly when ecclesiastical assumptions

have to be fought against, about the priesthood of all believers. Very

well, if that principle is a true one--and it is a true one--it has

other applications than simply controversial, and is meant for other

uses than simply that you should brandish it in the face of sacerdotal

claims and priest-ridden churches. Ye are all priests,' that is to say,

the meaning of the existence of a Christian Church is to raise up a

cloud of witnesses, and make every lip vocal with the name of Jesus

Christ the Lord. And you, dear brethren, you, the idlers of a church

and congregation, are doing all that you can to thwart the divine

purpose, and to destroy the very meaning of the existence of the church

to which you belong.

And let me remind you, too, that such silence is clearly contrary to

all Christian principle, inasmuch as one main purpose of the Gospel

being given us is to shift our centre from ourselves, first to Christ,

and then, if I may so say, to others. The very thing from which

Christianity is meant to deliver us is the very thing that these idle,

silent believers are indulging in, namely, the possession of God's

gifts for their own profit and enjoyment. What is the use of your

saying that you are Christian people if, in your very religion, you are

practising the very vice that Jesus Christ has come to destroy?

Selfishness is the opposite, the formal contradiction, of Christianity,

and in the measure in which your religion is self-regarding, it is no

religion at all. You are doing your best to counterwork the very main

purpose of the Gospel upon yourselves, when in silence you possess, or

fancy that you possess, the gift of His love.

And then, still further, let me remind you that this absolutely

un-Christian character of silence is manifested, if you consider that

the end of the Gospel for each of us is to bring us into full and happy

sympathy with Christ, and likeness to Him. And how is that purpose

being effected in His professed followers,' if they know nothing of the

experience of looking on the world with Christ's eyes, or of the thrill

of pity caught from Him, and have no sympathy with, in the sense of any

reflected experience of, the sense of obligation to help the helpless

which nailed Him to the Cross? We say that we are followers of One who

so loved the world' that He died for it; we say that we long to be

transformed into His likeness, and yet we put away from ourselves the

spirit that regards our brethren as He regarded us all; and never dream

of copying, howsoever feebly in our lives and efforts, the pattern that

was set before us in His death.

O dear brethren! if a man see his brother have need, and shutteth up

his bowels of compassion against him, how dwelleth the love of God in

him?' And if a Christian looks upon a world without Christ, and has

only a tepid sympathy and a faint realisation of the misery, and never

does anything to lighten it by a grain, how can he pretend that he

takes Jesus Christ for his Pattern and Example? Silence is manifestly a

sin by reason of its inhumanity, and its contrariety to every principle

of the Gospel.

III. Now, still further, let me point you to the retribution on

silence.

These four men, no doubt, had some superstitious idea that mischief

might come to them in the darkness. But they expressed a truth when

they said, If we be silent, some evil'--or, as the word might be

translated, some punishment will find us.' I desire to lay this on your

hearts, dear brethren, that like all other selfish things, the silence

of the Christian does him harm instead of good.

For instance, if you want to learn anything, set yourself to teach it.

In trying to spread the name of Jesus Christ by your own personal

effort, you will get a firmer hold of the truths that you attempt to

impress upon others. I do not know any better cure for a great deal of

unwholesome and superfluous speculation than to go into the slums and

see what it is that tells there. That is a test of what is central and

what is surface, in Christianity. I do not know any better discipline

for a man whose religion is suffering from too much leisure and

curiosity than to take a course of evangelistic work. He will find out

then where the power is, and a great many cobwebs will be blown away.

Be sure of this, that convictions unspoken, like plants grown in a

cellar, will get very white in the stems, and will bear no fruit. Be

sure of this, that a religion which is dumb will very soon tend to lose

its possession of the truth, and that if you carry that great gift hid

away in your heart it will be like locking up some singing-bird in a

box. When you come to open it, the bird will be dead. There are, I have

no doubt, many whom I am now addressing whose religion has all but, if

not entirely, ebbed away from them, mainly because they have all their

days been dumb Christians. That is one part of the punishment.

And another part is that silence is avenged by the dying out of the

sympathies which inspire speech. It is the punishment of the selfish

man that he becomes more selfish. It is the punishment of the heart,

which never expands in sympathy, that its walls shrivel and contract,

until there is scarcely blood enough between them to be impelled

through the veins. Feelings which it is joy and nobleness to possess

are nurtured and strengthened by expression; and the silent Christian

is punished by becoming at last utterly indifferent to the woes of the

world and to the spread of the Gospel. I think I could lay my finger,

if I dared, on some of my audience who have got perilously near to that

point.

And then again let me remind you that there is another form of the

punishment, and that is the loss of all the blessed experience of the

reaper's joy; and let me point you in a sentence to the final time of

retribution. There shall stand in that last day, as Scripture teaches

us, humble workers before the Throne who will say, Behold! I, and the

children whom Thou hast given me.' And there will stand some before the

Throne, solitary; and I wonder if they will not feel lonely when they

go into heaven, and find not a soul there to look them in the eyes and

say, Thou didst lead me to the Christ, and I am here to welcome thee.'

He that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.' Do you not

think that then there will steal a shadow of shame across the spirit of

the servant who stood idle in the market-place all the day with the

wretched excuse, No man hath hired me,' when the Master had hired him

beforehand, and given him such wages in advance?

O dear brethren! the cure for silence is to keep near that Master, and

to drink in His Spirit; and then, as I beseech you to do, think, think,

think of your obligations in the light of the Cross until you can say,

Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given,'

not this burden imposed, that I, even I, should preach' the Name that

is above every name. Open Thou my lips, and my mouth shall shew forth

Thy praise.'

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13. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p3.1

14. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iii-p1.1

15. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iv-p11.1

16. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p4.1

17. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iv-p1.1

18. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iv-p3.1

19. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iv-p3.1

20. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiii-p8.2

21. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.viii-p6.1

22. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p12.1

23. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p5.1

24. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.v-p1.1

25. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p6.1

26. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p5.1

27. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.v-p1.1

28. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p6.1

29. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p13.1

30. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p4.1

31. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p6.1

32. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p1.1

33. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p3.1

34. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p7.1

35. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p7.1

36. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p3.1

37. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p18.1

38. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p7.1

39. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p1.1

40. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p8.1

41. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.viii-p1.1

42. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p9.1

43. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.ix-p1.1

44. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p10.1

45. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.x-p1.1

46. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p11.1

47. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p1.1

48. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p2.1

49. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p12.1

50. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xii-p1.1

51. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p13.1

52. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiii-p1.1

53. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p14.1

54. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiv-p1.1

55. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p14.1

56. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiv-p1.1

57. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p15.1

58. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.i-p1.1

59. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.i-p4.2

60. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p16.1

61. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ii-p1.1

62. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p16.1

63. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ii-p1.1

64. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.3

65. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.1

66. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p17.1

67. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iii-p1.1

68. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p4.1

69. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p18.1

70. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p1.1

71. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p4.1

72. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p6.1

73. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p13.1

74. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.5

75. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.2

76. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.4

77. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.1

78. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p8.1

79. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.5

80. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.3

81. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.6

82. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p13.1

83. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.3

84. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p12.1

85. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p7.4

86. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.i-p3.1

87. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p12.2

88. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.5

89. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.1

90. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.2

91. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.4

92. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.5

93. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.6

94. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.7

95. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p19.1

96. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p1.1

97. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p6.1

98. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p7.1

99. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p2.6

100. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p2.2

101. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p9.1

102. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p10.1

103. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p9.2

104. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p20.1

105. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vi-p1.1

106. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p21.1

107. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vii-p1.1

108. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p21.1

109. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vii-p1.1

110. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p22.1

111. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.viii-p1.1

112. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p2.1

113. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p3.1

114. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p23.1

115. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p1.1

116. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p2.2

117. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p2.3

118. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p2.4

119. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p6.1

120. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p3.1

121. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p24.1

122. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.x-p1.1

123. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p25.1

124. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xi-p1.1

125. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xi-p9.1

126. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p26.1

127. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xii-p1.1

128. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p27.1

129. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiii-p1.1

130. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p28.1

131. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p2.1

132. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p3.1

133. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p4.1

134. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p3.2

135. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p9.1

136. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p28.1

137. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p2.2

138. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p11.1

139. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p3.1

140. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p3.1

141. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p3.4

142. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p6.1

143. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p4.1

144. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p29.1

145. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p1.1

146. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p4.1

147. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p3.3

148. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p3.4

149. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p3.5

150. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p7.2

151. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p2.1

152. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p2.2

153. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p30.1

154. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p1.1

155. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p7.1

156. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p2.3

157. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p6.1

158. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p31.1

159. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p1.1

160. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p7.1

161. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p7.1

162. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p11.1

163. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p11.2

164. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p11.1

165. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p11.3

166. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p13.1

167. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p8.2

168. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p8.1

169. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p8.3

170. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p32.1

171. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.iii-p1.1

172. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p33.1

173. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.iv-p1.1

174. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p34.1

175. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.v-p1.1

176. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p35.1

177. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.vi-p1.1

178. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p36.1

179. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.vii-p1.1

180. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p37.1

181. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.viii-p1.1

182. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.viii-p2.1

183. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.viii-p6.2

184. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ix-p5.1

185. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p38.1

186. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ix-p1.1

187. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p4.1

188. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p39.1

189. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p1.1

190. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p4.1

191. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p7.1

192. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p40.1

193. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.v.i-p1.1

194. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.v.i-p2.1

195. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.v.i-p12.1

196. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.i-p2.1

197. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.i-p2.1

198. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p41.1

199. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.i-p1.1

200. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p2.2

201. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p10.2

202. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p2.1

203. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p42.1

204. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p1.1

205. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p4.1

206. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p6.1

207. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p4.2

208. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p7.1

209. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p8.1

210. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p8.2

211. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p8.2

212. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p10.1

213. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p43.1

214. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p1.1

215. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p2.3

216. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.1

217. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.2

218. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.2

219. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p2.3

220. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p5.1

221. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p2.1

222. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p44.1

223. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iv-p1.1

224. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p3.1

225. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p8.1

226. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xi-p3.1

227. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iv-p10.1

228. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iv-p4.1

229. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p2.2

230. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p5.1

231. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p2.1

232. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p1.1

233. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p45.1

234. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p6.1

235. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p3.1

236. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p1.1

237. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p46.1

238. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p8.2

239. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p9.1

240. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p4.1

241. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p47.1

242. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p1.1

243. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p5.1

244. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p7.1

245. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p7.2

246. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p7.3

247. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p5.2

248. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p9.1

249. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p48.1

250. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.viii-p1.1

251. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p10.1

252. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.viii-p5.1

253. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiii-p3.1

254. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p49.1

255. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ix-p1.1

256. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ix-p6.1

257. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ix-p7.1

258. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p50.1

259. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p1.1

260. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p6.1

261. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p2.2

262. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p2.1

263. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p7.1

264. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p8.1

265. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p4.1

266. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p51.1

267. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p1.1

268. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p12.1

269. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p12.3

270. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p13.2

271. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p2.4

272. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p2.1

273. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p52.1

274. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p1.1

275. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p2.3

276. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p6.2

277. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p6.1

278. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p6.1

279. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p8.1

280. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p2.2

281. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xii-p8.1

282. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p53.1

283. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiii-p1.1

284. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiii-p9.1

285. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiii-p2.1

286. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p54.1

287. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiv-p1.1

288. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p55.1

289. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv-p1.1

290. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p55.1

291. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv-p1.1

292. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p56.1

293. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv\_1-p1.1

294. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p2.3

295. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p2.1

296. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p2.1

297. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p57.1

298. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xvi-p1.1

299. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p2.2

300. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p58.1

301. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xvii-p1.1

302. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p5.1

303. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p5.1

304. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p59.1

305. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xviii-p1.1

306. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p2.4

307. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p60.1

308. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p1.1

309. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p4.1

310. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p6.1

311. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p4.2

312. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p1.1

313. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p1.1

314. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p13.1

315. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p17.1

316. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p3.1

317. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p2.1

318. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p1.1

319. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p3.1

320. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p5.1

321. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p6.1

322. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p6.2

323. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iii-p2.1

324. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p3.1

325. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iii-p1.1

326. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iii-p2.2

327. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iii-p8.1

328. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p4.1

329. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iv-p1.1

330. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p8.2

331. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p5.1

332. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p1.1

333. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p4.1

334. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p6.1

335. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p6.1

336. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p8.1

337. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.i-p11.1

338. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p11.1

339. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p4.1

340. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p6.1

341. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p1.1

342. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p5.1

343. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p7.1

344. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p10.1

345. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p11.1

346. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p11.1

347. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.2

348. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.1

349. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p11.2

350. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.3

351. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.4

352. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.5

353. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p11.2

354. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p13.5

355. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.viii-p4.1

356. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.viii-p5.1

357. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p7.1

358. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vii-p1.1

359. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p8.1

360. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.viii-p1.1

361. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.viii-p13.1

362. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p9.1

363. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ix-p1.1

364. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p10.1

365. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.x-p1.1

366. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p11.1

367. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xi-p1.1

368. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xii-p3.1

369. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p12.1

370. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xii-p1.1

371. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p13.1

372. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xiii-p1.1

373. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p14.1

374. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xiv-p1.1

375. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vii-p14.1

376. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvi-p4.1

377. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vii-p8.1

378. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p15.1

379. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xv-p1.1

380. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xv-p3.1

381. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vii-p15.1

382. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p16.1

383. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvi-p1.1

384. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p2.2

385. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p17.1

386. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p1.1

387. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p2.3

388. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p2.4

389. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p3.2

390. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p4.1

391. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p18.1

392. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p1.1

393. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p19.1

394. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p3.1

395. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xix-p1.1

396. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p19.1

397. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xix-p1.1

398. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p8.1

399. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p20.1

400. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xx-p1.1

401. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.i-p7.1

402. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.i-p1.1

403. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p21.1

404. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p22.1

405. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.ii-p1.1

406. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p23.1

407. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iii-p1.1

408. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p24.1

409. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p1.1

410. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p4.2

411. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p3.1

412. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p4.1

413. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p8.1

414. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p12.2

415. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p12.3

416. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p2.1

417. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p25.1

418. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.v-p1.1

419. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p26.1

420. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.vi-p1.1

421. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p27.1

422. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.vii-p1.1

423. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p28.1

424. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p1.1

425. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p3.1

426. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p3.2

427. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xii-p5.1

428. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p29.1

429. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.ix-p1.1

430. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p30.1

431. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.x-p1.1

432. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xii-p4.1

433. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p31.1

434. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xi-p1.1

435. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiii-p8.1

436. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p32.1

437. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xii-p1.1

438. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p33.1

439. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiii-p1.3

440. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xii-p9.1

441. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p34.1

442. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiv-p1.1

443. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xvi-p1.1

444. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p36.1

445. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xv-p1.1

446. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p35.1

447. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xvii-p1.1

448. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p37.1

449. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p38.1

450. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xviii-p1.1

451. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xviii-p7.1

452. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xviii-p11.1

453. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xviii-p13.1

454. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p1.1

455. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p39.1

456. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p2.1

457. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p3.1

458. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p57.2

459. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p9.3

460. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xvi-p2.1

461. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p7.1

462. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p9.1

463. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xx-p1.1

464. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p40.1

465. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxi-p1.1

466. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p41.1

467. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxii-p1.1

468. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p42.1

469. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiii-p1.1

470. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p43.1

471. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p44.1

472. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiv-p1.1

473. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p44.1

474. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiv-p1.1

475. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.i-p1.1

476. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p45.1

477. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.i-p3.1

478. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.ii-p1.1

479. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p46.1

480. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iii-p1.1

481. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p47.1

482. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iv-p2.1

483. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p48.1

484. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iv-p1.1

485. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p49.1

486. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.v-p1.1

487. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p7.1

488. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p3.1

489. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p50.1

490. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p1.1

491. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p8.1

492. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p8.2

493. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p10.1

494. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p10.2

495. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p12.1

496. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p51.1

497. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vii-p1.1

498. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p51.1

499. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vii-p1.1

500. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.viii-p5.2

501. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p52.1

502. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.viii-p1.1

503. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.viii-p5.1

504. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.viii-p11.1

505. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p53.1

506. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.ix-p1.1

507. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p54.1

508. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.x-p1.1

509. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.x-p6.1

510. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.x-p10.1

511. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.x-p10.2

512. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p55.1

513. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.xi-p1.1

514. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iii-p2.1

515. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.x-p5.1

516. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p15.1

517. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p15.2

518. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xix-p8.1

519. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p4.2

520. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p4.2

521. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iii-p5.1

522. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p33.2

523. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.iv-p2.1

524. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiv-p6.1

525. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p7.1

526. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p10.1

527. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p2.1

528. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p3.1

529. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p6.1

530. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p7.1

531. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p12.2

532. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p7.2

533. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.x-p7.3

534. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p13.1

535. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.x-p14.1

536. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p11.1

537. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p11.3

538. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p7.1

539. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p4.1

540. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p27.1

541. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p14.2

542. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p14.2

543. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiii-p1.1

544. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiii-p1.2

545. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p14.3

546. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiv-p3.1

547. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p6.1

548. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p6.1

549. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.ii-p2.1

550. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.i-p46.2

551. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p12.1

552. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.1

553. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.6

554. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.8

555. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p5.2

556. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.2

557. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.5

558. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.5

559. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.4

560. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.i-p7.2

561. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p2.1

562. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.3

563. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ix-p7.1

564. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p5.1

565. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p23.7

566. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.i-p0.1

567. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.ii-p0.1

568. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iii-p0.1

569. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.iv-p0.1

570. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.v-p0.1

571. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.v-p0.1

572. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vi-p0.1

573. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.vii-p0.1

574. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.viii-p0.1

575. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.ix-p0.1

576. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.x-p0.1

577. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xi-p0.1

578. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xii-p0.1

579. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiii-p0.1

580. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiv-p0.1

581. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.ii.xiv-p0.1

582. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.i-p0.1

583. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ii-p0.1

584. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ii-p0.1

585. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iii-p0.1

586. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.iv-p0.1

587. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.v-p0.1

588. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vi-p0.1

589. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vii-p0.1

590. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.vii-p0.1

591. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.viii-p0.1

592. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.ix-p0.1

593. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.x-p0.1

594. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xi-p0.1

595. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xii-p0.1

596. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiii-p0.1

597. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p0.1

598. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xiv-p0.1

599. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iii.xv-p0.1

600. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.i-p0.1

601. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ii-p0.1

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603. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.iv-p0.1

604. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.v-p0.1

605. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.vi-p0.1

606. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.vii-p0.1

607. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.viii-p0.1

608. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.ix-p0.1

609. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.iv.x-p0.1

610. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.v.i-p0.1

611. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.i-p0.1

612. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.ii-p0.1

613. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.iii-p0.1

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615. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.v-p0.1

616. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vi-p0.1

617. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.vii-p0.1

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621. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xi-p0.1

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623. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiii-p0.1

624. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xiv-p0.1

625. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv-p0.1

626. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv-p0.1

627. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xv\_1-p0.2

628. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xvi-p0.1

629. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#ii.vi.xvii-p0.1

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632. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.i-p0.1

633. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ii-p0.1

634. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iii-p0.1

635. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.iv-p0.1

636. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.v-p0.1

637. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vi-p0.1

638. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.vii-p0.1

639. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.viii-p0.1

640. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.ix-p0.1

641. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.x-p0.1

642. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xi-p0.1

643. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xii-p0.1

644. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xiii-p0.1

645. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xiv-p0.1

646. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xv-p0.1

647. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvi-p0.1

648. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xvii-p0.1

649. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xviii-p0.1

650. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xix-p0.1

651. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xix-p0.1

652. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.ii.xx-p0.1

653. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.i-p0.1

654. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.ii-p0.1

655. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iii-p0.1

656. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.iv-p0.1

657. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.v-p0.1

658. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.vi-p0.1

659. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.vii-p0.1

660. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.viii-p0.1

661. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.ix-p0.1

662. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.x-p0.1

663. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xi-p0.1

664. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xii-p0.1

665. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiii-p0.1

666. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xiv-p0.1

667. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xvi-p0.1

668. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xv-p0.1

669. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xvii-p0.1

670. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xviii-p0.1

671. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xix-p0.1

672. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xx-p0.1

673. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxi-p0.1

674. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxii-p0.1

675. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiii-p0.1

676. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiv-p0.1

677. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iii.xxiv-p0.1

678. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.i-p0.1

679. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.ii-p0.1

680. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iii-p0.1

681. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.iv-p0.1

682. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.v-p0.1

683. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vi-p0.1

684. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vii-p0.1

685. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.vii-p0.1

686. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.viii-p0.1

687. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.ix-p0.1

688. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.x-p0.1

689. file://localhost/ccel/m/maclaren/deut/cache/deut.html3#iii.iv.xi-p0.1